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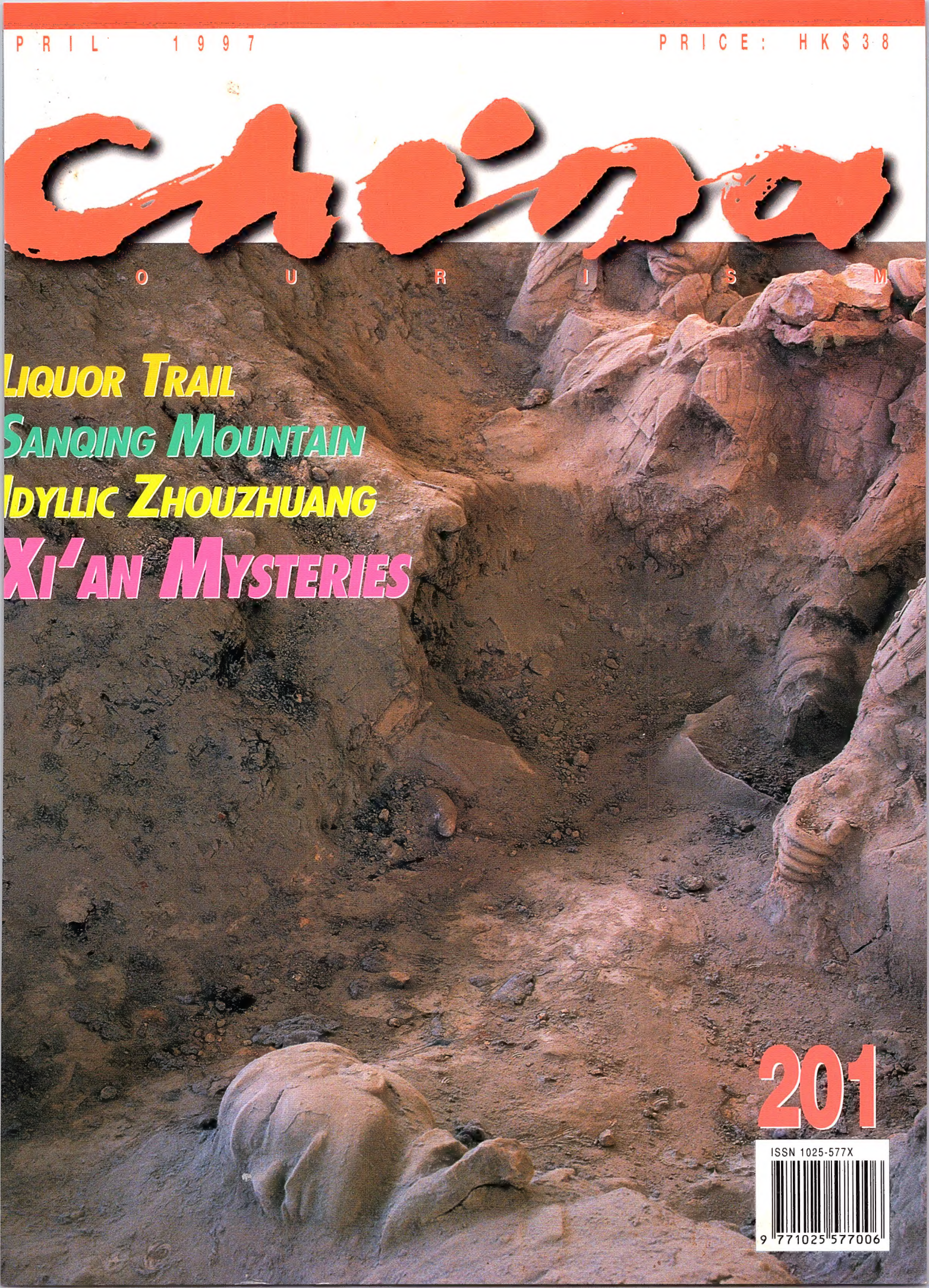

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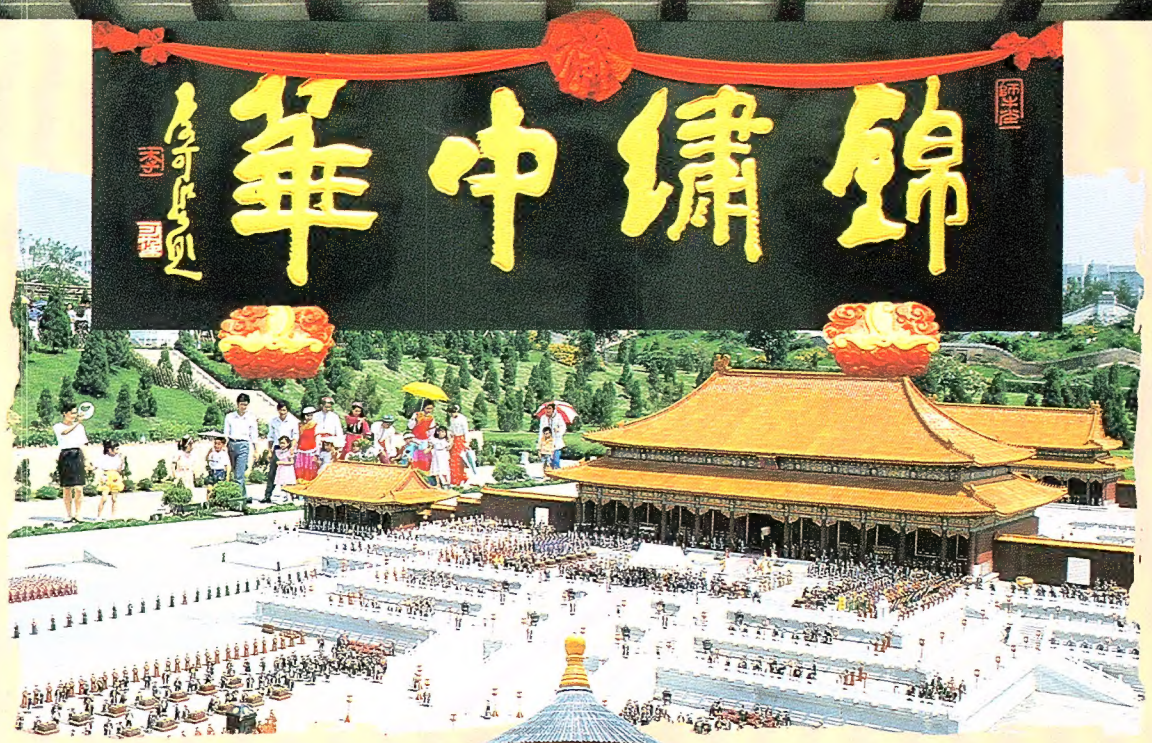

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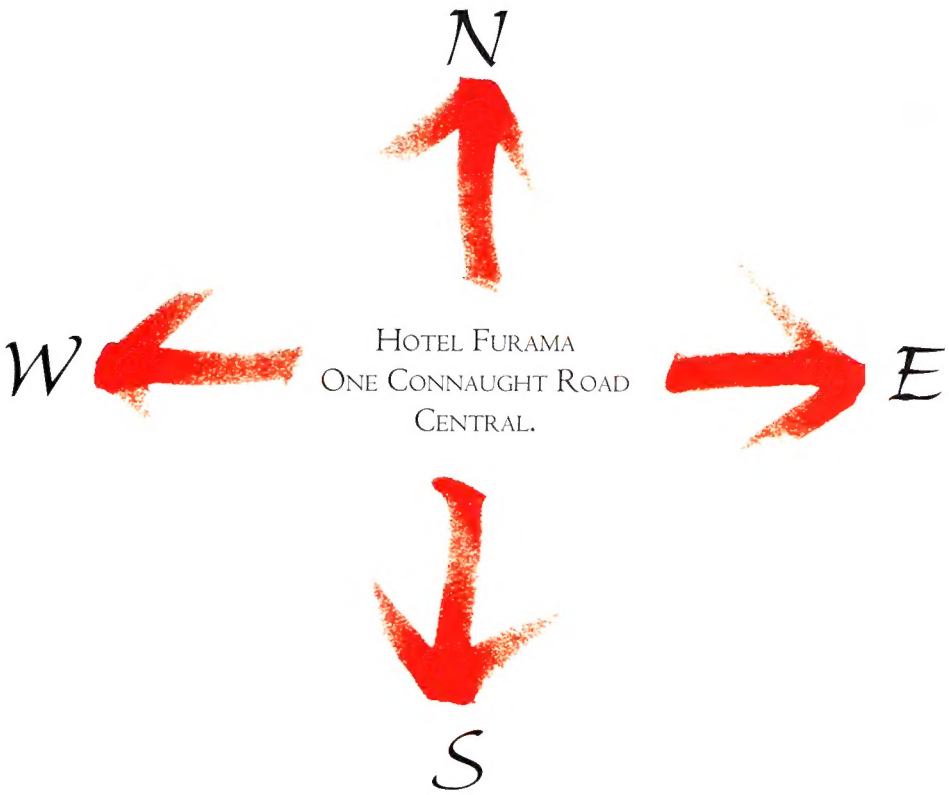

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Photos by Pan Ke, Hu Yaohui and Shi Baoxiu
Article by Shi Baoxiu
Buried below the city of Xi'an are hundreds of emperors and their family members belonging to the Qin, Han, Sui and Tang dynasties. The mysterious stories surrounding each of these ancient VIPs is exactly what attracts thousands of tourists to the grand capital of past eras.

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Photos by Chen Jin and Peng Zhenge
Article by Ye Wen
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Photos & Article by Shan Xiaogang
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Photos & Article by Xie Guanghui

Between Shanghai and Suzhou is an ancient waterside town called Zhouzhuang. Taking a one-day tour through the town, the visitor can learn about its history, enjoy the Ming- and Qing-dynasty architecture and later taste the fresh, local food.

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Walking Through the Taihang Mountains 74

Photos & Article by Shan Xiaogang

Lying north to south, the Taihang Mountains form a natural barrier between the North China Plain and the Shanxi Plateau. Called "Earth Spine" by the ancients, the mountain range rises like a giant screen to touch the sky. Walking through one section of it, along the ancient post road, one can test one's stamina and courage while exploring its many historical relics.

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The natives of Shanxi who have a long history of wheaten food have created a wide variety of delicacies made of wheat flour. A restaurant known as "Kingdom of Wheat Food" in Taiyuan, capital of the province, is worth a visit.

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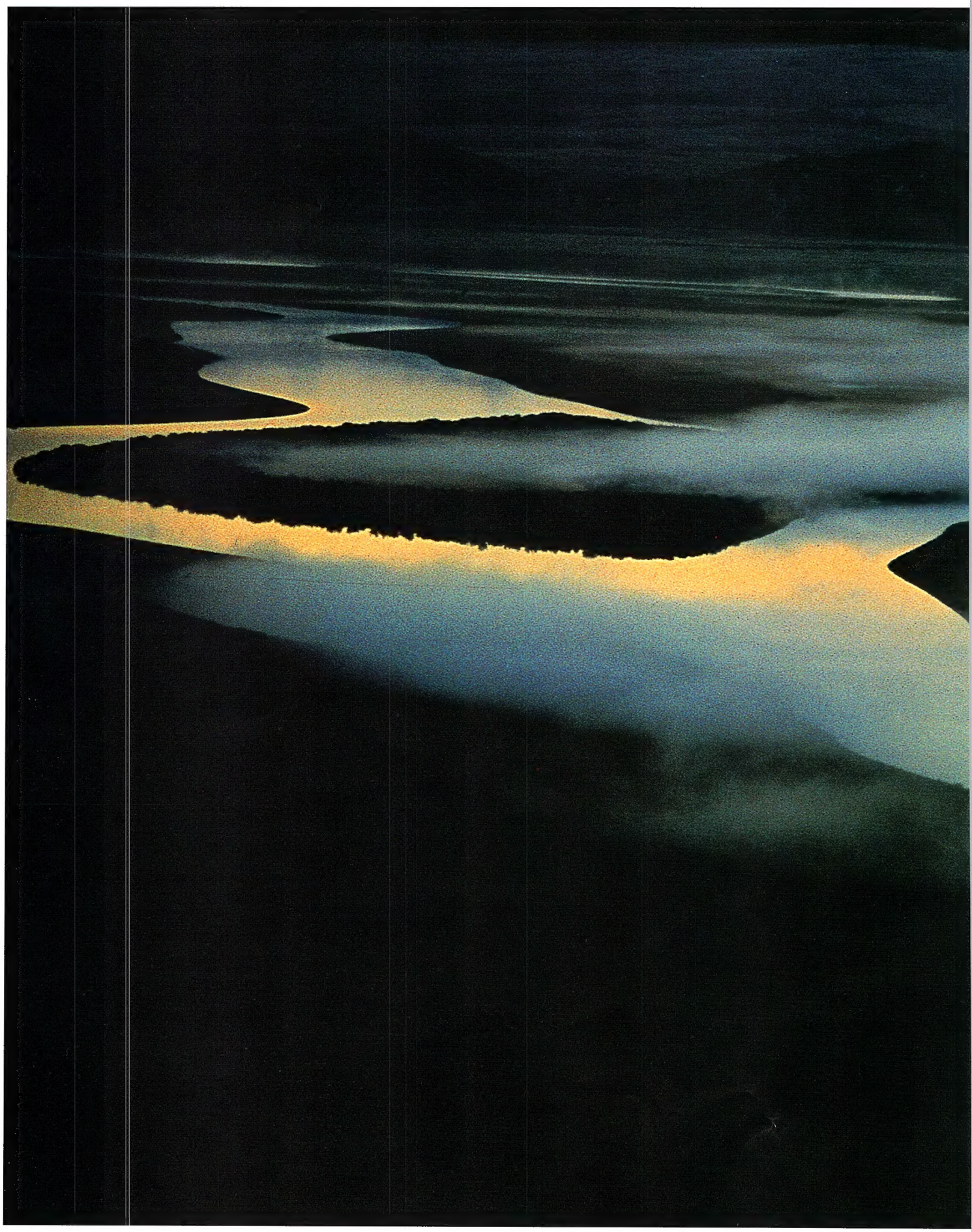
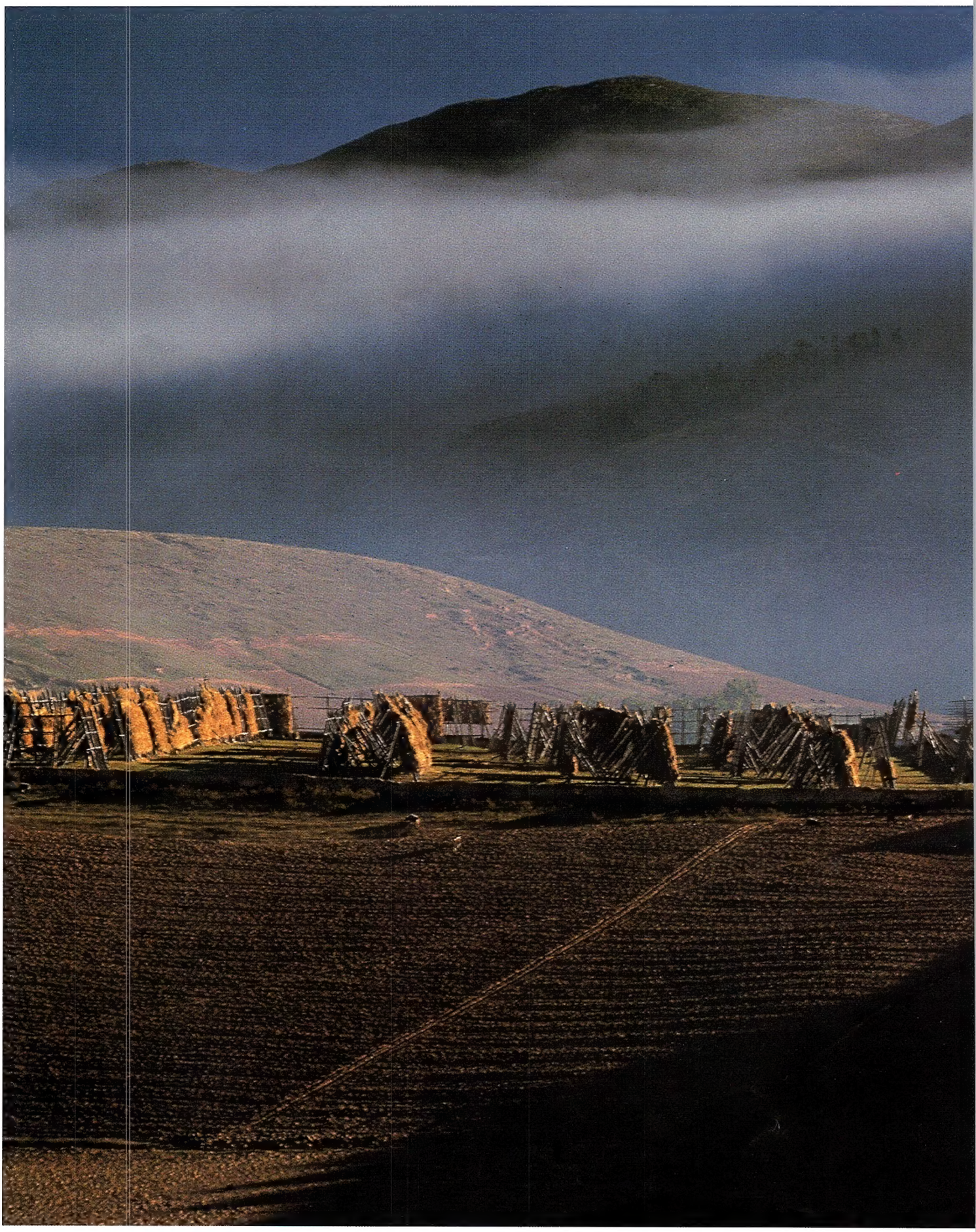


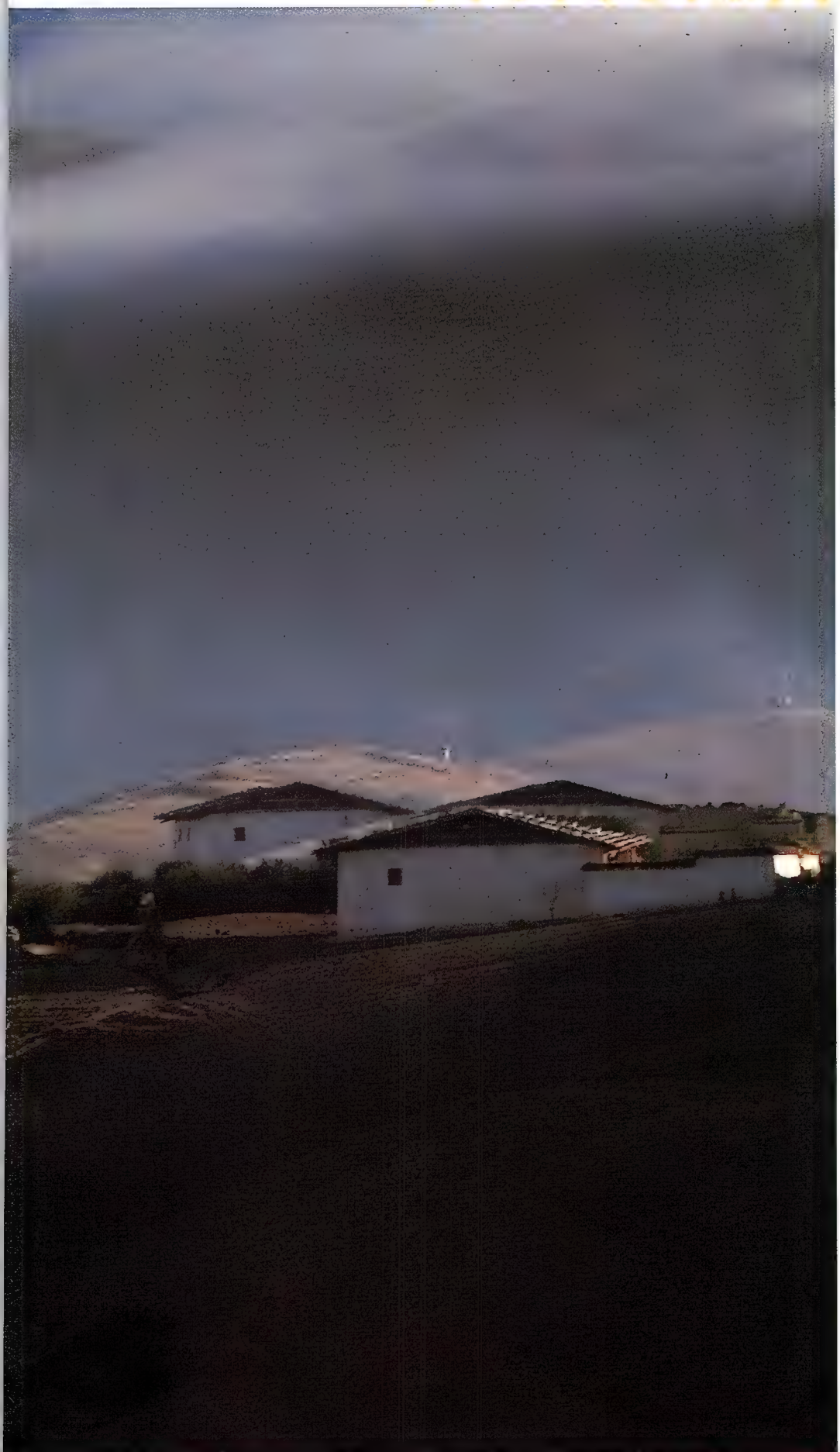
Mysteriously Veiled Heavenly River

by Zhao Chengan

While taking pictures of a river, an experienced photographer uses natural low-angle lighting to obtain a reflection on the mirror-like surface. However, to achieve this ideal effect, one has to catch the light just at the right moment – either during sunrise or sunset. At those moments in spring and autumn, a veil of mist covers the river, adding an air of mystery to the quiet and peaceful scene. This is just how this shot, at the source of the Bayanbulak River in Xinjiang, was taken. In addition, the aperture was set on the lighter spot making the photograph even more enchanting.

Estimated data: 80-200 mm zoom; shutter =1/60 second; aperture = 5.6; 135 mm Fuji RVP slide.





The Quietness of Autumn

by Wang Miao

Scenic photographs should be pretty, but the definition of "pretty" varies with each photographer's perception, as do the many techniques employed to accomplish their goals. In most cases, special angles, lighting and atmosphere created by freak weather are used to give unique expression to an otherwise ordinary scene. Exactly these elements applied when this photograph was taken on the highland of Zhongdian, Yunnan. The low-angle light of early morning gives this picture a distinctive contrast between the cold and the warm. The newly-sowed fields giving it more layers and the gloating clouds in distance adding rich colours – all together making the hay and buildings at the centre of the composition more eye-catching.

Estimated data: Nikon, 80-200 mm zoom; shutter = 1/30 second; aperture =8 ; 135 mm Kodak EPP slide.

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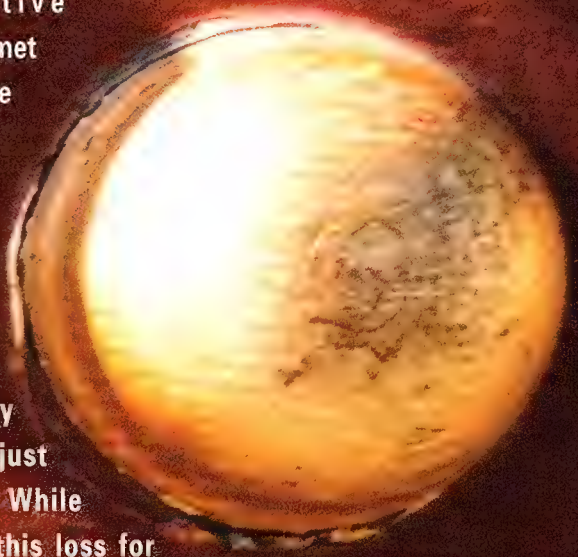
Tracing the Ancient Glory

Xi'an, the ancient city which was once known as Chang'an, is not new to most of our readers, however, many may not be aware of the numerous mysteries surrounding it.

If touring the city in spring, simply by joining the groups of elderly people sunning themselves leaning on the walls of the ancient Square City, you will hear talk relating to Xi'an, both yesteryear and present day. These oral stories may not be as accurate as historical records, but they can appeal to one's sense of curiosity.

One of the stories says that in 1949, when the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference met to decide which city should be the New China's capital, Xi'an was beaten by Beijing by just two votes. While regretting this loss for historical reasons, the elders cannot help complaining about the warriors through history who burnt the capital's gorgeous palaces to ground. Meanwhile, another is heard to tell of the many young people who have gone abroad to study or work, and another joins in by saying that during the Tang Dynasty Chang'an was no less prosperous than today's New York.



Rumours and stories reflect the pride that the local people have for their hometown. Some might say that talking of the past is a kind of ageing mentality, others might argue that only by knowing the past can one work out a proper plan for the future.... But all agree that Xi'an, an ancient city where 13 dynasties established their capitals, is a cultural treasure house. By taking the time to delve further into its past glory, the tourist will benefit in many ways.

Photo by Liu Yang

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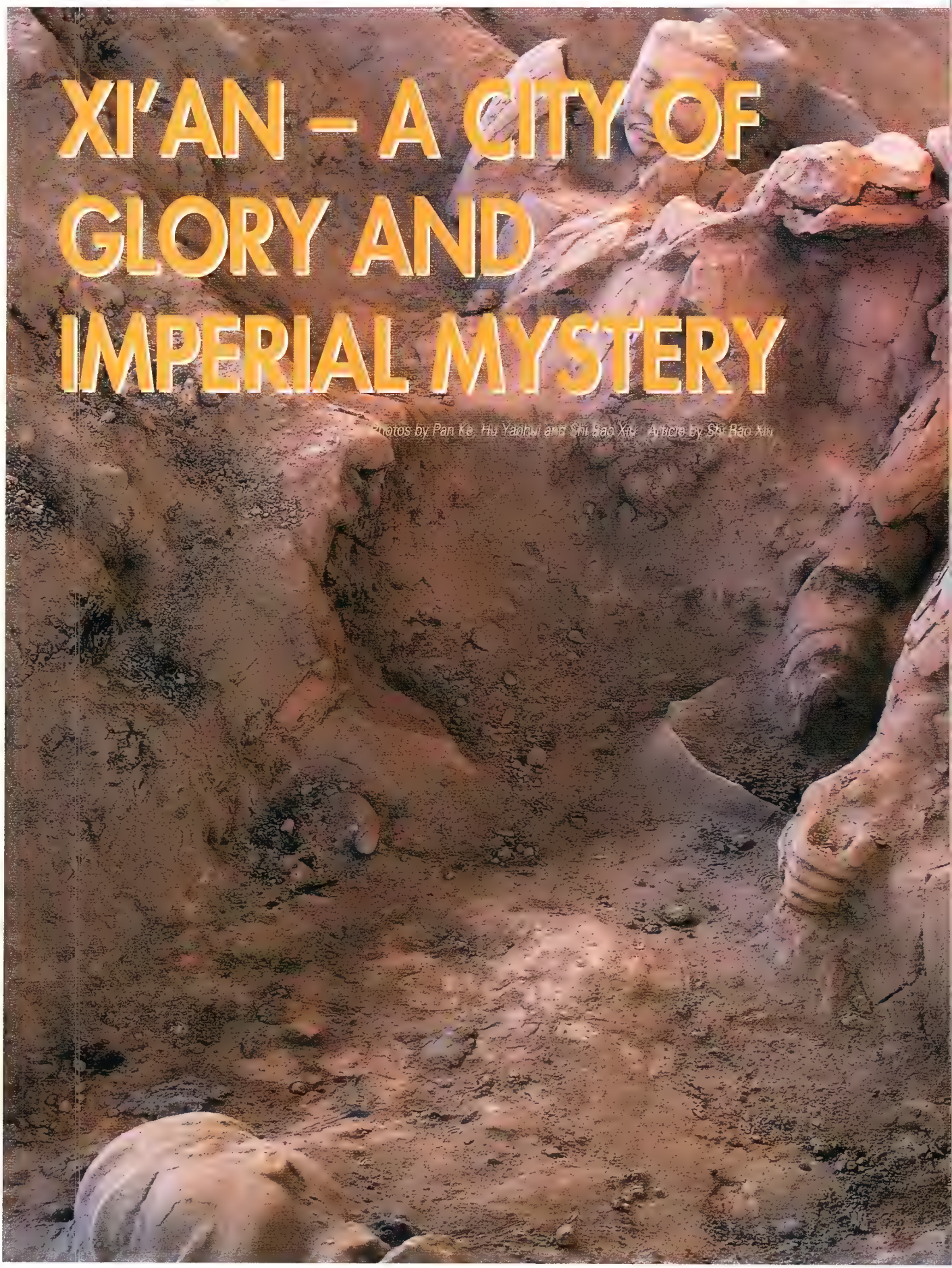


XI'AN – A CITY OF GLORY AND IMPERIAL MYSTERY

Photos by Pan Ke, Hu Yaobu and Shi Bao Xiu Article by Shi Bao Xiu

(by Pan Ke)

Chang'an, known today as Xi'an, had its heyday a thousand years ago. Strategically situated between the Qinling Mountains in the south and the Wei River in the north, the city entered an era of political importance and cultural grandeur when King Wu of the Western Zhou Dynasty (11th century-770 B.C.) established his capital here during the 11th century B.C.

The city held onto its spotlight until the demise of the all-powerful Tang Dynasty after which the Chinese capital was moved eastward to Kaifeng, Nanjing and Beijing respectively. The city which had seen the rise and fall of 13 dynasties was renamed Xi'an (West Stability) and given a different role to play – to maintain security and stability in western China.

The locals proudly describe their city as "A city that sprawls above and below ground". Beneath the majestic city walls lies a mysterious maze of pompous, well-furnished tomb compounds, underground palaces and chambers in which deceased emperors, empresses and imperial consorts of the Zhou, Qin, Han, Sui and Tang dynasties acted out their obsession with immortality and the wish to have a comfortable afterlife. The land of Xi'an is pockmarked with ancient palaces, pagodas, pavilions and monasteries. Each belonging to a fascinating episode of China's age-old history, they all have bizarre and romantic stories behind them.

1. WHO DISCOVERED THE TERRACOTTA WARRIORS

Terracotta warriors (by Xie Guanghui)

Extolled as being the Eighth Wonder of the World, the tomb of Emperor Qinshihuang and the accompanying army of terracotta soldiers are the main reason people come to Xi'an. The sight of the emperor's royal army of entombed terracotta warriors never fails to take one's breath away. Soldiers and generals, standing or kneeling, are graphic evidence of the power that the mighty ruler once held. But how were they discovered, after being entombed for more than 2,000 years?

In March 1974, peasants of Xiyang Village, Lintong County, were digging a well when one of them brought his pickaxe down on what looked like a human head. Having wiped away the mud, the men began speculating to whom the head belonged to. One of them said it was the head of an arhat, another ascribed it to some divine being, but nobody could say for sure what it really was. News of the discovery soon spread to Beijing and three months later, a team of archaeologists arrived at the scene and found more traces. One old man in his 70's told the team that as a young boy he remembered seeing his father dig up a "brick man" while digging a new well. For a time the new well produced plenty of water, but soon it dried out. His father, suspecting it was the fault of the "brick man" who was playing a trick on him, drew it out of the earth and hung it from a tree for a few days before he smashed it into pieces. However, the well remained dry and so he had no alternative but to abandon it. The archaeologist team began drilling holes around the well. At five metres they were to discover one of the greatest archaeological sites in the world. Excavation of the underground vault of earth and timber revealed thousands of life-sized terracotta warriors and their horses. Just how far the necropolis actually extends is anyone's guess.

Tips

Opening hours: 9:00-17:00 daily
Transport: The tomb lies in Lintong County. Special-line buses are available at major hotels in Xi'an. A shuttle bus service can also be found at the Xi'an Railway Station.

2. WHERE ARE XUAN ZANG'S REMAINS

Depiction of Xuan Zang's trip to India (by Chan Yat Nin)

The popular hero Monk Xuan Zang in the mythological classic, *Journey to the West*, was actually a real person. Three years after Li Shimin ascended to the throne as Emperor Taizong of the Tang Dynasty, the 28-year-old monk took a long and arduous journey across the West Region to India accompanied by a caravan of merchants. A decade or more later, he returned to Chang'an with a heavy load of Buddhist scriptures which he had brought from India. He received a hero's welcome and the emperor decorated him with the title of Reverent Tripitaka of Comprehensive Enlightenment. He installed the monk in the Ci'en Temple where Xuan began the arduous job of translating the Buddhist scriptures into Chinese.

The Greater Wild Goose Pagoda (by Yang Lim

However, in order to avoid the constant visits by members of the imperial family as well as court officials, Xuan Zang moved out of the capital and installed himself in the Yuhua Temple, which was tucked away in the Yijun Mountain some 200 *li away* from Chang'an. For the next 19 years he worked tirelessly on the scriptures, until one day he had finally finished. The 13 million-word corpus of canonical Buddhist scriptures produced 1,335 Chinese volumes. He also worked out a book based on his own experience, which is entitled *Notes on the West Region Journey of Great Tang's Envoys.* Unfortunately, the long years of fatigue had taken a heavy toll on his health and Xuan Zang died in the temple in 664 at the age of 63.

At first, his remains were buried at Bailuyuan (White Deer Tableland) only to be moved later into the Hall of Translators at the

3. DISCOVERY OF SAKYAMUNI'S SARIRA

The Famen Temple in Fufeng County, Shaanxi Province, is famed not only for its venerated age of more than 1,700 years but also for often being used as a background in stories depicted in local operas. Historical records reveal that the temple was the site of a secret treasure trove of priceless relics, but nobody knew where exactly they were hidden. Then, more than three centuries ago, a violent earthquake hit the Xi'an area, causing the pagoda inside the temple to crack and slant. The event prompted speculation that the treasures hidden inside the pagoda were about to be unveiled by the Lord of Heaven. During a heavy rain storm in 1981, half the pagoda crumbled into ruins. Six years later, on April 3, 1987, archaeologists clearing the debris flashed a light at a seam in the foundation and caught a glimpse of the gold and silver inside. The archaeologists discreetly covered the seam up and returned under the cover of darkness. In the basement of the pagoda they were delighted to discover a wealth of artefacts, all finely crafted and most of them well preserved. Working on night shifts the archaeologists began an inventory of the treasures. On Sakyamuni's birthday, which fell on May 5, or the eighth day of the fourth lunar month, a finger sarira was discovered along with three pieces of sarira contained in three boxes – all were attributed to the founder of Buddhism, Sakyamuni.

A Tang-dynasty sarira pagoda (by Chan Yat Nin)

Tips

Opening Hours: 9:00-17:00 daily

Transport: Take long-distance bus to Fufeng County at the Xi'an General Bus Station or Yuxiang Gate to arrive at the county seat, then change to a special-line minibus to reach there.

foot of the Greater Wild Goose Pagoda, an impressive fortress-like wood and brick structure built to house the translated scriptures. Then, following an edict issued by Emperor Li Zhi (husband of Empress Wu Zetian who later took power and became China's first empress), a pagoda together with a temple was built at Shaoling Tableland to house the monk's remains. The complex was later named Xingjiao Temple (Temple for Promoting Buddhism) by Li Heng, another Tang-dynasty emperor.

The gate of Xingjiao Temple (by Shi Bao Xiu)

However, other Buddhist organisations across the country soon began vying for Xuan Zang's remains – to be able to enshrine just one piece of it was regarded as a great honour. Kuiji, a disciple of Xuan, came into possession of his skull-cap and enshrined it in the Zige (Purple Chamber) Temple in the south-western part of Chang'an. In 988, a monk from south of the Yangtse River arrived at the temple and managed to come away with the skull-cap and hid it in the Tianxi Temple of Nanjing. In 1943, invading Japanese troops demolished the pagoda to make room for the construction of a Japanese shrine and in the process they unearthed a stone reliquary bearing an inscription recounting the story of how Xuan Zang's skull-cap had found its way to south China and how it had been re-buried during the Song and Ming dynasties. Enthralled by the discovery, the Japanese wanted to ship it home, but they were fearful of arousing the indignation of the Chinese people. So they split the skull-cap into six pieces and shipped one of them to Saitama County, Japan.

Tips

Xingjiao Temple Opening Hours: 9:00-17:00 daily;

Transport: Minibus to Duqu or Wangqu and alight at Xingjiao temple, then walk about 10 minutes.

4. WHERE IS THE ANCIENT CHANG'AN

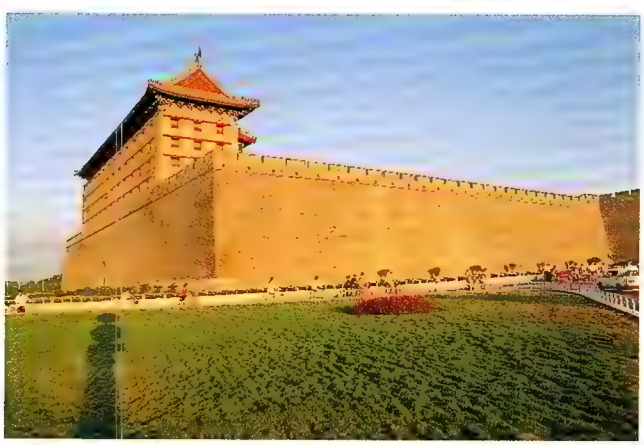
The first thing that one sees upon stepping out of Xi'an Railway Station is the imposing ancient city wall. Enthralled by its sheer size one might believe that this rectangular city inside the wall is that of olden-day Chang'an belonging to the Han and Tang dynasties. However, the city of Xi'an as it stands today is a far cry from the Chang'an of the Han and Tang Dynasties.

The wall which one sees today was built some six centuries ago during the reign of Zhu Yuanzhang, the founding emperor of the Ming Dynasty who took the throne in Nanjing in 1368. The following year, the emperor issued an order for General Xu Da to attack Chang'an, (which the Yuan Dynasty had renamed "Fengyuan"). When the city was conquered, it was renamed Xi'an. Despite the victory, the emperor was worried – of all the places under heaven, he knew that Chang'an was once the magnificent capital of the former state of Qin and that it was of paramount strategic importance. If, heaven forbid, it ever fell into the hands of rebels, it would become a real headache for the central government. For this reason Zhu Yuanzhang decided to install his second son in Xi'an as Prince of Qin. He then set about rebuilding the city, expanding it again by one third, dredging the moat, and heightening the city walls, and thereby transforming it into an impregnable stronghold of unprecedented size.

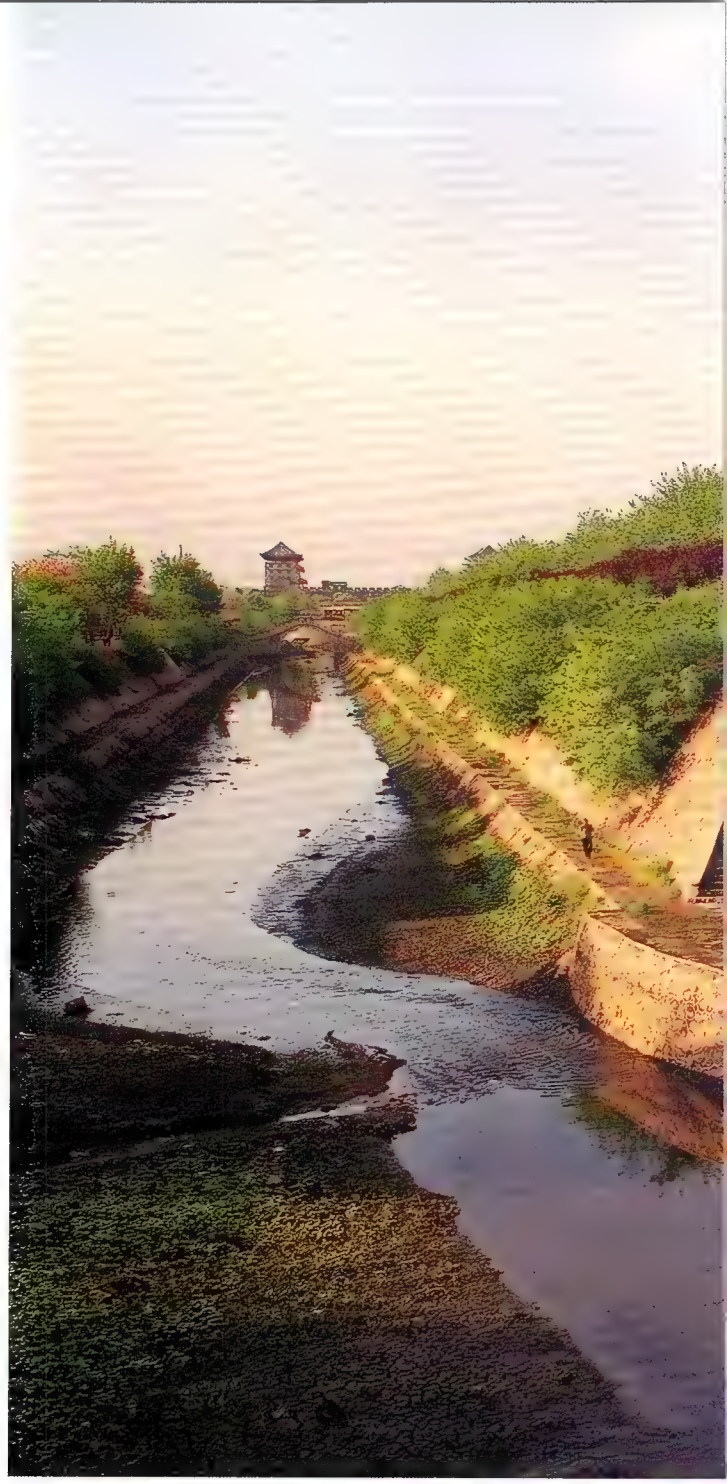
Food street (by Xie Guanghui)

Xi'an is one of the few old cities where ancient city walls are still visible, and so, few visitors leave without seeing its Ming-dynasty city walls. Built on the foundations of the Tang Forbidden City, they form a rectangle with a circumference of 14 kilometres. On each side of the wall is a gateway, each topped by a 33-metre-tall tower. In front of each of the four gates stands a semi-circle fortress to enforce the defence of the city. The wall is 12 metres high and the width at the top is wide enough for five cars to run abreast.

The top of the city walls provides an overview of the densely populated residential quarters, interspersed by a tiny number of tall buildings. The roads form a neat grid of streets and wide avenues. Those living within the confines of the city walls consider themselves "urbanites", implying that those living outside the walls are "country folk".



West gate of the ancient city (by Hu Yaohui)



The South City Gate was the first to open to tourists, perhaps due to its proximity to the Xi'an Stele Forest and the Ancient Cultural Street. The gateway is lined on either side with stores selling traditional Chinese calligraphic works and paintings, folk arts and imitation cultural relics. The rostrum on top of the barbican entrance is decorated with imitation Qin-dynasty terracotta warriors, ancient canons, broad swords, javelins, swords and halberds, with which tourists often pose for snapshots. Furthermore, a watchtower and a

The city wall and moat of Ming Dynasty (by Hu Yaohui) Insert: Ruins of the Han-dynasty Chang'an (by Hu Yaohui)

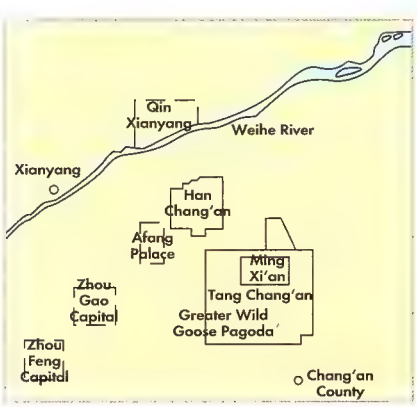
drawbridge have been rebuilt outside the gate as tourist attractions.

Having visited the Ming-dynasty city one is apt to ask where is the ancient Chang'an which Liu Bang (the founding father of the Han Dynasty) built after his troops had routed Xiang Yu, the Lord of Chu and his arch-rival for supremacy? It is found on a stretch of flatland 10 kilometres to the north-west of Xi'an. Not much is left of the once mighty Han-dynasty capital, except for a dozen-kilometre-long pile of what was apparently the former city wall. The much-vaunted Weiyang Palace is no more – only its elevated foundation of rammed-earth is left, strewn with fragments of tiles, bricks, masonry and whatnot.

The Tang-dynasty Chang'an, six times larger than the Ming-dynasty Xi'an, stood on the site of modern-day Xi'an. Under the Tang, Chang'an became the largest city in Asia.

Tips

Open Hours: 9:00-18:00 daily



5. IMPERIAL PORTENTS LOCKED

The Bell Tower (by Hu Yaohui)

Situated at the centre of Xi'an, at the cross of its major streets which radiate in four directions, the enormous Bell Tower stands as a paragon of orthodox Chinese architecture. Its four inter-connecting doorways face the city gates in the east, west, north and south.

Built in the late 14th century its imposing square structure is topped by a five-metre-high rooftop, plated with copper and gold. Beneath its portals old-timers are often seen sitting recounting tales handed down by their forefathers about the city's hidden powers. One story has it that the Bell Tower was built on the mouth of a waterway which emptied itself into the East China Sea. This weighty edifice protected the people of Xi'an from the threat of flooding. Another story attributes the city's impenetrable security and lasting peace to the auspicious golden roof of the Bell Tower believing that it saved the city from the invading Japanese troops who besieged nearby Tongguan County for months but never managed to conquer it.

Today, the Bell Tower is a major tourist spot which attracts thousands of visitors yearly. Stalls inside the tower sell an assortment of souvenirs ranging from imitation classic paintings and calligraphic works, porcelain, to all sorts of antiques.

Another story tells that Zhu Yuanzhang, the founding emperor of the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), could not sleep at night after he took over the throne and made Nanjing his capital. It turned out that he was worried that the defunct capital might have access to divine powers which would allow some rival forces to rise up. Liu Bowen, a trusted prime minister and also an expert in the Eight Trigrams, soothed Zhu's concerns by suggesting that a bell tower be built to suppress the city's portents. Hence the advent of this solid structure at the centre of Xi'an.

Neither Emperor Zhu Yuanzhang nor his adviser Liu Bowen could ever have expected that the legacy they left behind would become the popular tourist attraction it is today.

Tips

Bell Tower opening hours: 9:00-18:00 daily

Transport: Trolley bus nos. 101, 102, 104 and 106; and bus Nos. 1, 3, 6, 8 and 41 take you there.

6. THE PUZZLE OF LADY YANG'S DEATH

Tomb of Lady Yang(by Hu Wugong)

Maweipo Town, some 40 kilometres west of Xi'an, is known for the tomb of Imperial Lady Yang Yuhuan, a favourite concubine of Emperor Minghuang of the Tang Dynasty, who was reputedly one of the four beauties in ancient China. Surprisingly, the tomb is built of brick making it stand out in a place where other graves are mostly marked by mounds of dirt. Apparently, the tomb of Imperial Lady Yang was also made of dirt, however, there was a bizarre custom among local young women: on the third day of the third lunar month they took an early-spring outing to the tomb where they would take a handful of dirt before returning home. Once home, they would mix the dirt which they called "imperial Lady Yang's rouge" with wheat flour and use it to powder their faces in the belief that the mixture could make their skin fairer and more attractive. Alarmed by the mound's diminishing size, local gentry pooled their money and paved the tomb with bricks to keep away the dirt-pinchers!

Of all the tales which exist about Imperial Lady Yang, the one surrounding her death is perhaps the most intriguing. History books and ancient poems generally embrace the theory that the lady was asked to commit suicide by hanging herself at Maweipo, and it seems there was no doubt about how she died. However, in 1963 a young Japanese woman appeared on a TV show with a family genealogical record proving herself to be a descendant of the Imperial Lady Yang. The story in Japan is that during the Maweipo Incident, Imperial Lady Yang was spirited across the Pacific to Japan. Two tombs in Japan are attributed to this legendary Lady Yang, and a statue of her can be seen in the city of Kyoto. Tomb robbers in ancient China also said they found no remains in the tomb.

Tips Opening hours: 9:00-17:00 daily;
Transport: The tomb, located in Maweinpo Town in Xingping County, can be reached by taking West-Line tourist bus or long-distance bus from Xi'an to Wugong.

7. THE MUSLIM COMMUNITY IN XI'AN

During the heyday of the Tang Dynasty, a constant stream of Arab envoys, merchants and missionaries entered Chang'an via the Silk Road.

The massive immigration of Arabians to Chang'an took place in the wake of the An Lushan-Shi Siming Rebellion of 756. At that time the Tang Dynasty lacked troops and bargained with the Persian empire to borrow their soldiers in order to quell the rebellion. Records of this event can be found in both Chinese and Arabian history books. "The Tang emperor agreed," says one book, "that once their mission was accomplished, the Arab officers and soldiers could remain in Chang'an and marry Han women. Approval was also granted to their request for the construction of a Muslim mosque." These lines indicate that during the late Tang Dynasty Chang'an had already emerged as an international metropolis which was appealing to foreign settlers. Also, many Simu people (among which there were quite a few Muslims) fought with Mongol troops during the Yuan Dynasty and also chose to settle in Xi'an.

Celebrating the Corban at the Grand Mosque (by Jiao Jingquan)

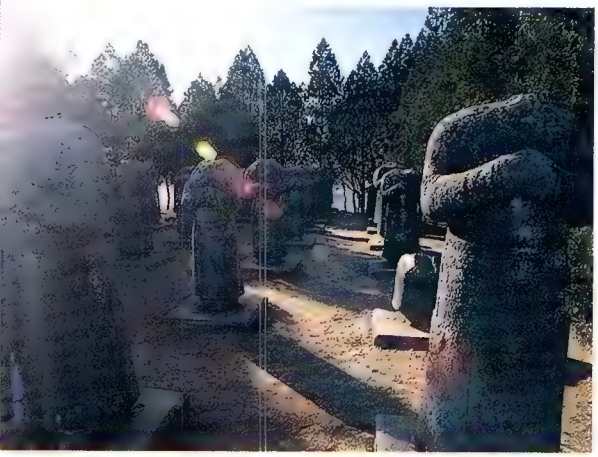
Thus, a Chinese Muslim community was eventually formed, and a new ethnic minority group, the Hui, was created. As Chinese Muslims in other parts of China, the Huis in Xi'an are actually descendants of people from Central Asia, mainly the Persians and Arabs, who mixed with the Hans, the Mongols and other ethnic groups. It is estimated there are 100,000 Hui people in Xi'an today. The majority of them inhabit the ancient capital's Xicheng (West City) District, many of them making a living by opening a small restaurant serving Muslim food. Though they speak the same local dialect as other Xi'an citizens, they have reserved a vocabulary of Arabic origins which they often use while talking to their own people.

Tips The Muslim Food Street is located between West Street North and Lianhu Road. Take trolley bus No. 101 and alight at the stop for the Bell Tower or Qiaozhangkou. Follow the various signs for Muslim restaurants.

8. WHY ARE THE IMPERIAL GUESTS' HEADS MISSING

At Qianling Tomb one may be impressed by the Divine Way leading up to the tomb of Emperor Gaozong and his wife, Empress Wu Zetian, which is flanked by 61 life-size stone statues. Each of the men stand to deferential attention with their hands cupped in front of their chests, some of them having words such as "king", "prince", "general" or "envoy" carved on the back. But what astonishes the visitor most is that all the statues are headless.

These statues represent the distinguished state guests who had been invited to attend the funeral of Emperor Gaozong of the Tang Dynasty. His widow, Empress Wu, had the statues carved and erected to show off the pomp and pageantry of the funeral she had held for her husband. Local people say that the heads of these statues were missing as long as they can remember. So how these men lost their heads remains a puzzle. Legend has it that Buming, son of the monarch of a West Region kingdom, was disgruntled when he got word that the stone statue of his father was erected in a deferential posture in front of the mausoleum. Masquerading as a monk, he travelled all the way to Chang'an where he flew into a rage at the sight of his father's statue and picked up a stone to throw at it, only he was caught and beat up by local people. In exasperation, he hatched another plan. That night he trampled underfoot all the farm crops growing around the 61 statues and daubed mud on their legs and feet. When day broke, he spread word in neighbouring villages that some divine force had transformed all the statues into goblins and that they had gone out into the crop fields and caused the damage – only by removing their heads could they be stopped. The villagers, convinced, rushed to the mausoleum, and in no time at all they sent the 61 heads rolling to the ground. Having accomplished his aim, the prince packed up the head of his father's statue and returned home. Upon returning to his kingdom, he was stunned to see that everyone in the palace was in mourning. The king had been murdered a month earlier, and his head was missing.



The 61 headless statues(by Shi Bao Xiu)

Tips Opening hours: 9:00-17:00 daily;
Transport: Take West-Line special bus or long-distance bus from Yuxiang Gate to Qianxian County. From the county seat, hire a motortricycle to ride to the tomb.

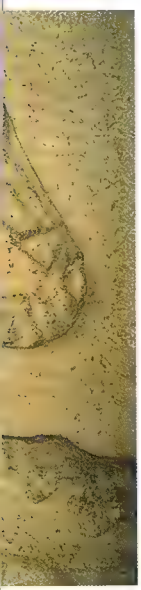
9. WHO SMASHED THE IMPERIAL STEEDS

Among the exhibits of the Shaanxi Provincial Museum are a group of stone carvings of six steeds which belonged to the Shaoling Mausoleum on Jiujun Mountain, north-east of Liquan County. As an outstanding example of ancient Chinese stone sculpture, these high-relief carvings were modelled after the six horses that Emperor Taizong of the Tang dynasty had used during his years of combat.

However, four of them are broken. How could such priceless treasures become smashed? The story behind it involves a notorious robbery. In 1914 an American traveller came across a rubbing of the stone carvings. Stunned by their beauty, he contacted Huang Hefang, an antique dealer of the Zungu Studio in Beijing's Liulichan Street. Offering a vast sum of money, he asked Huang to do

One of the smashed steeds (by Chan Yat Nin)

The blank tomb stone of Empress Wu Zetian (by Shi Baoxiu)



whatever he could to obtain the carvings for him. Thus, Huang bribed Yuan Kewen, the eldest son of Yuan Shikai, the usurper of China's political power, getting him to write an introduction letter for him. With the letter, Huang went to Xi'an, where, under the protection of the Shaanxi garrison, he had two of the carvings (the "Horse Named Saluzi" and the "Horse with Curling Hair") shipped to Beijing and delivered to his American client. Huang was plotting to get the other four when an anti-Yuan uprising broke out.

In 1917, Huang arrived again in Xi'an, where he bribed the father of Chen Shufan, the governor of Shaanxi Province. With the help of the local government, he sneaked into the Shaoling Mausoleum and broke up the remaining four carvings into pieces and then packed them into boxes. Loading them aboard a boat, he attempted to ship them down the Weihe River out of Tongguan. However, the boat became stranded at Weinan and the secret was let out. Chen had to have the carvings shipped back.

Today, two of the six carvings are ostensibly on display in the museum of the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia, the United States, only their replicas are housed in the Shaanxi Provincial Museum.

Tips Shaanxi Provincial Museum Opening hours: 8:30-17:00 daily;
Transport: Located at the entrance of Fuxue Lane inside the southern city wall, the museum can be reached by taking bus No. 14 or minibus 402 and alighting at the northern end of Wenyi Road.

TOURIST MAP OF XI'AN

Drum Tower: With the Bell Tower standing 200 metres away to the west, the Drum Tower dates back to the rule of Zhu Yuanzhang of the Ming Dynasty. A staircase conducts the visitor right to the top of the building for a nice view of the Bell Tower. The store in the Drum Tower sells genuine and imitation cultural relics and calligraphic works and paintings by famous artists.

Grand Muslim Mosque: First built during the Tang Dynasty, the Grand Muslim Mosque is the largest and best preserved Islamic monastery in Xi'an. Famed for its splendid architecture, the mosque is situated in Huajue Lane north-west of the Bell Tower and adjacent to the Bell Tower Cultural Street.

Tourist Spots Located in the Suburbs of Xi'an

Zhouyuan Museum: Zhouyuan Tableland on the boundary between Qishan and Fufeng counties was home to the ancestors of Western Zhou monarchs. When the imperial family moved its capital to Luoyang, it had many ancestral temples razed to the ground and a colossal amount of treasures were buried underground. In the following several thousands years, a constant flow of bronzes, bone tools, jade and pottery has been unearthed from the site. Most of these finds are on display in the Zhouyuan Museum which can be reached by minibus from Fufeng County.

Shaanxi Provincial Museum: Located approximately five kilometres north-west of the Greater Wild Goose Pagoda, this is China's No. 1 museum as far as modern facilities go. On display in the Shaanxi Hall are a good assortment of finely crafted artefacts ranging from the period of Lantian Man to the end of the Qing Dynasty. Exhibits associated with the celebrated Silk Road are displayed in a separate pavilion, as are the porcelain items exhumed from a place called Yaozhou. The museum is well worth a visit.

Opening hours: 9:00-17:00 daily

Transport: Bus Nos. 5, 27, and 14.

Huaqing Pond: The foot of the Lishan Mountain in southern Lintong County is known for its good-quality hot springs, around which clusters of villas have been built by the emperors of various dynasties. The buildings on the premises today were constructed by the Empress Dowager Cixi of the late Qing Dynasty who took refuge here during the invasion of China by the Allied Armies of Eight Power Nations.

Opening hours: 8:00-18:00 daily

Transport: Situated on the road leading to the Qinshihuang Mausoleum and the Museum of Terracotta Warriors, it can be easily reached.

Hanyao Cave Dwellings: The area features a series of cave dwellings where Wang Baochuan, the heroine of the classical Chinese opera *Wudian Slope*, reputedly lived. Legend has it that Wang, the daughter of the prime minister, endured a hard life for 18 years until her husband, General Xue Rengui, returned. Hanyao is situated approximately two kilometres east of the Prince Qin's Palace and can be reached by minibus.

(by Xie Guanghui)

(by Pan Ke)

RETRACING ANCIENT FOOTSTEPS

Despite its venerated history, Xi'an is surprisingly lacking in artefacts extolling the various dynastic periods. The long years of war and turmoil wreaked havoc on the city's cultural heritage. Historical warlords such as Xiang Yu, the Lord of Chu, Dong Zhuo the tyrannical general who bullied the young emperor of Eastern Han Dynasty, and Zhu Wen the subordinate to the peasant uprising leader Huang Chao all played their part in destroying Chang'an. Had the city not have been exposed to endless battles, the imperial palaces of the Qin, Han and Tang dynasties would not have been razed to the ground and buried in ruin.

With tourism booming, Xi'an is trying to attract visitors by dusting off the city's glorious past: an in-situ museum has been built at Banpo to showcase a primitive community living some 5,000 years ago; Qinshihuang's awesome array of terracotta warriors, Tang-dynasty palaces and monasteries have been renovated and refurbished. From an entertainment point of view tourists are entertained with authentic ancient style song and dance shows, as well as being wined and dined in a true royal fashion. All of this is designed to arouse a feeling within the visitor that he or she is travelling through antiquity.

Tang-Style Palace Music and Dance

The Hall of Tang-Dynastic Music situated outside the south gate of Xi'an entertains visitors with performances of music and dance in the royal style of the Tang Dynasty. On stage, the celebrated poet Li Bai is seen composing poetry, the impresario Li Guinian vocalises his trademark voice, and Imperial Lady Yang is seen dancing to the accompaniment of flute music played by her husband, Emperor Minghuang. It is likely that the concerts are performed on an even more impressive scale than what really took place inside the imperial palace of the Tang Dynasty.

Performing time: 10:00-20:00 daily

(by Shi Bao)

(by Xie Guanghui)

Banpo Village Museum

The Banpo Village Museum showcases an agricultural village of 5,000 years old. Clay figurines scattered around the village give an idea of daily activities, some are making pottery, others are patching pieces of animal skin together with bone needles.

Opening hours: 9:00-17:00 daily

Transport: Take bus No. 11 or trolley bus No. 105 and alight at Banpo stop.

(by Shi Bao Xiu)

Xingqing Palace Park

A park has been built on the ruins of the Xingqing Palace, with all its buildings bearing Tang-dynasty names. The most famous of them is Chenxiang (Eaglewood) Pavilion, where Emperor Minghuang and Imperial Lady Yang had spent many romantic hours. It was here that the celebrated poet Li Bai got drunk and composed a famous poem in eulogy of the beauty of the imperial lady.

(by Shi Bao Xiu)

Ancient Cultural Street

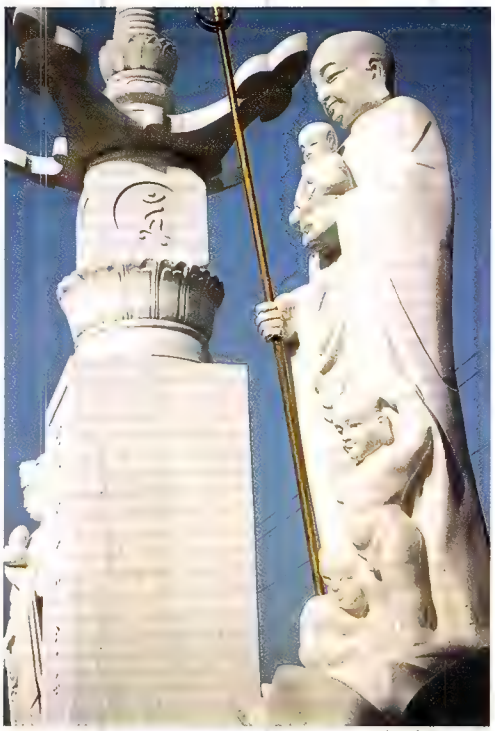
To the east of the south city gate of Xi'an there is an ancient cultural street by the name of Gate of the Academy. The flag-stone street is lined on both sides with imitation ancient pavilions and chambers selling duplicate antiques ranging from porcelains and jade carvings to calligraphic works and paintings. Also available for sale are calligraphic works and paintings by contemporary artists. Outside, peddlers hawk their wares of ancient pottery, coins, decorated tiles, jade pendants, incense burners and ancient books, calligraphic manuals.... Whether the items on sale are genuine antiques or not is anyone's guess. There is another antique street by the Great Muslim Mosque behind the Drum Tower where every-day items, such as old locks, tobacco pipes and snuff bottles are on sale.

Imperial Palace of the Qin Dynasty

According to the history books, after eliminating the six rival states, Emperor Qinshihuang confiscated all weapons from the people to forestall future rebellion. The metal melted out of the weapons was cast into 12 bronze statues and installed in his palace. The imperial palace of the Qin Dynasty is no more, and gone for ever are the sculptures. Now, an imitation Qin Palace has been built about two kilometres to the east of the Greater Wild Goose Pagoda, complete with replicas of the 12 bronze men which are so tall that they dwarf passers-by. In an ancient folklore museum situated nearby, men wearing Qin-dynasty costumes are seen playing ancient musical instruments, carving inscriptions on stone tablets and printing ancient books.

Opening hours: 9:00 - 18:00

Transport: Bus No. 41



(by Shi Bao Xiu)

Ancient Temple Rebuilt on Leyou Tableland

During the Tang Dynasty the Leyou Tableland on the south-eastern outskirts of Xi'an used to be part of the city of Chang'an. It was here that great poets such as Li Bai, Du Fu, Li Shangyin and Du Mu gathered and composed the great poems which have been handed down to this day. With funds donated by Japanese Buddhists, the Tang-dynasty Qinglong Temple has been rebuilt on the tableland with pavilions, chambers and halls designed in an unmistakable style of the Tang Dynasty. A monument to Kukai (774-835), a Japanese monk who had stayed in the temple, has been erected within the compound planted with cherry trees from Japan.

(by Shi Bao Xiu)

Dressing Up and Posing as Ancient Figures

At each of the showcase ancient spot, tourists can make themselves stars by putting on the colourful costumes of the ancient time and having their pictures taken.

(by Shi Bao Xiu)

Ancient Entertainment in the Hotels

Imitating ancient times has become popular in Xi'an and many hotels and guesthouses are decorated in Tang-dynasty glory. The Tanghua Hotel, for example, situated to the east of the Greater Wild Goose Pagoda, treats its guests to a choice of imperial dishes while royally entertains them with a Tang-style variety show. Others such as the Chang'an Castle Hotel outside the south city gate, the Qindu Hotel outside the west city gate, the Tangcheng Hotel in the southern suburb, and the Grand New World Hotel in the city centre are all decorated in tune with the city's time-honoured cultural heritage.

Travellers' Tips

Three-Day Tour:

Day One: Morning: Bell Tower, Southern City Wall, Stele Forest and Ancient Cultural Street. Afternoon: Shaanxi Provincial Museum, Greater Wild Goose Pagoda, Prince Qin's Palace, Xingjiao Temple.

Day Two: Morning: Museum of Qinshihuang's Terracotta Warriors and Mausoleum. Afternoon: Huaqing Pond and Banpo Museum.

Day Three: Qianling and Maoling mausoleums, Famen Temple, and Tomb of Imperial Lady Yang.

Seven-Day Tour:

Day One: Bell Tower, Southern City Wall, Stele Forest and Ancient Cultural Street.

Day Two: Greater Wild Goose Pagoda, Prince Qin's Palace, Shaanxi Provincial Museum, Folklore Museum, Hanyao Cave Dwellings, and Xingjiao Temple.

Day Three: Museum of Qinshihuang's Terracotta Warriors, Mausoleum of Qinshihuang, Huaqing Pond, Banpo Museum, Xingqing Park.

Day Four: Qianling, Shaoling and Maoling mausoleums, and Tomb of Imperial Lady Yang.

Day Five: Famen Temple, Zhouyuan Bronzes Museum, Temple of Prince Zhou.

Day Six: Emperor Huangdi's Mausoleum.

Day Seven: Dine in Muslim Street, visit the Grand Muslim Mosque and the Drum Tower Cultural Street to shop for antiques and imitation cultural relics, attend concerts in the style of the Tang-dynasty imperial palace.

Dining

Part of the fun of visiting Xi'an is sampling the local delicacies of Shaanxi Province. For 20 yuan one can eat the best dumplings Xi'an has to offer. Dumpling banquets can be held for around 1,000 yuan per table. Over the course of two hours all sorts of dishes are served, the dumplings ranging in size from big juicy ones to those the size of a thumb-nail and there are nearly two hundred different kinds of stuffing. Muslim restaurants in Xi'an serve other delicacies, *paomo*, or bagel in mutton or beef soup are perhaps the most representative.

Shopping

For cultural relics and calligraphic works or paintings by contemporary artists, the Ancient Cultural Street at the Gate of the Academy or near the Drum Tower are good places. Chinese customs will not stop you if the antiques you are carrying are from the late Qing Dynasty to the Republic, but watch out for fakes. The stores in Xi'an are full of replicas of bronzes, Qin-dynasty decorative tiles, terracotta warriors and tri-coloured Tang-dynasty pottery and copies of murals in the Tang-dynasty tombs. The same item may carry a different price tag from place to place, or shop to shop – if you want to bargain, learn something about the prices beforehand.

Transport

The Xi'an public transport system stretches to every corner of the city, but the buses are usually very crowded. Taxis, therefore, come in handy for excursions to scenic spots or places of historical interest in the suburbs; taxis in Xi'an are rather reasonable – a trip to the other side of the city costs little more than 10 yuan. If you want to visit imperial mausoleums in outlying areas, you may want to consider joining a group tour sponsored by the hotels or by a local travel service.

Weather

Spring and autumn are the best seasons to visit Xi'an. Summer tends to be rather hot, and a 10-day heat wave usually hits the city in July. Winter is mild, but the weather is rather dry.

Accommodation

Finding somewhere to stay in Xi'an is very easy owing to the many comfortable hotels, including quite a number of star-rated. A few hotels are listed for your convenience:

Name	Address	Tel No.	Standard Room (US$)
Tangcheng Hotel	3 Lingyuan Road South	5265711	46 (32 off season)
Jinhua Hotel	8 Changle Road West	3232981	90
Jian'guo Hotel	20 Jinyua Road South	3238888	80 (55 off season)
Jinrong Hotel	67 Shangde Road	7270457	25
Qinda Hotel	120 Dongda Street	7234004	19
Dongya Hotel	46 Luomashi Dongda Street	7214568	12
Xi'an Hotel	298 Dongda Street	7284473	15
Taiwan Hotel	68 Lianhu Road	7278911	30

LANDSCAPE

SANQING MOUNTAIN – WHERE TRANQUILLITY REIGNS

Photos & Article by Shan Xiaogang

Sea of clouds at the "Immortal Island"

Sanqing Mountain is located in the middle section of the Huaiyu Mountains on the borders between Yushan County and Dexing County in north-eastern Jiangxi Province. The name Sanqing (Three Purities) came about because its three peaks – specifically Yujing, Yuxu and Yuhua – rise abruptly like the three meditating gods worshipped by Taoist disciples Yuqing (Jade Purity), Shangqing (Upper Purity) and Taiqing (Supreme Purity). The mountain itself contains strangely-shaped rocks, springs, waterfalls, karst caves, clouds, rare flora and fauna and traces of glaciers belonging to the Quaternary Period. The main peak Yujing is 1,817 metres above sea level. The surrounding scenic area covers 230 square kilometres, next in size only to the Huangshan Mountains in the neighbouring province of Anhui, so the two mountains are described as sister mountains. Still, Sanqing Mountain has qualities different from those of Huangshan and is often referred to as the "number one immortal peak in south China" or "land of unique fortunate".

1

Cascading Waterfalls and Deep Pools

We arrived at Jinsha Village in the township of Sanqing in Yushan County just before dusk. The next morning, we toured the vicinity and came across several exciting waterfalls and deep pools that had been swollen by the previous night's rainfall. The most striking waterfall was Yulian (Jade Curtain) Waterfall on Shigu (Stone Drum) Peak where the water crashed down like a crystal curtain stretching more than 30 metres in both height and width. But the most unique sight that we came across that day was a bi-coloured waterfall at Chuanqiao on Heshang (Monk) Hill. Two water flows, one red, the other white, joined together to cascade into the same pool below.

Immortal Pointing the Way

In the afternoon, we rented a jeep and took off along a bumpy road to the Yuling Monastery situated half way up the mountain. Once there, we walked a short distance and found ourselves at a strategic passageway guarded by two peaks called Fengmen (Wind Gate).

To our surprise, we saw a stalagmite on the northern peak in the shape of a man's finger pointing towards the first entrance into the Sanqing Mountains, Xuanguan Pass. This sight is thus known as the Immortal Pointing the Way.

We duly paid our respects to the Gate God statue guarding the pass inside the stone niche, walked along the pass up some stone stairs, crossed the "Qingdu Suspension Bridge" and entered the centre of the Sanqing Immortal's Land. From this point onward, every step revealed a myriad of strangely-shaped rocks with descriptive names such as "Frog Viewing the Sky", "Heavenly Jade Stone",

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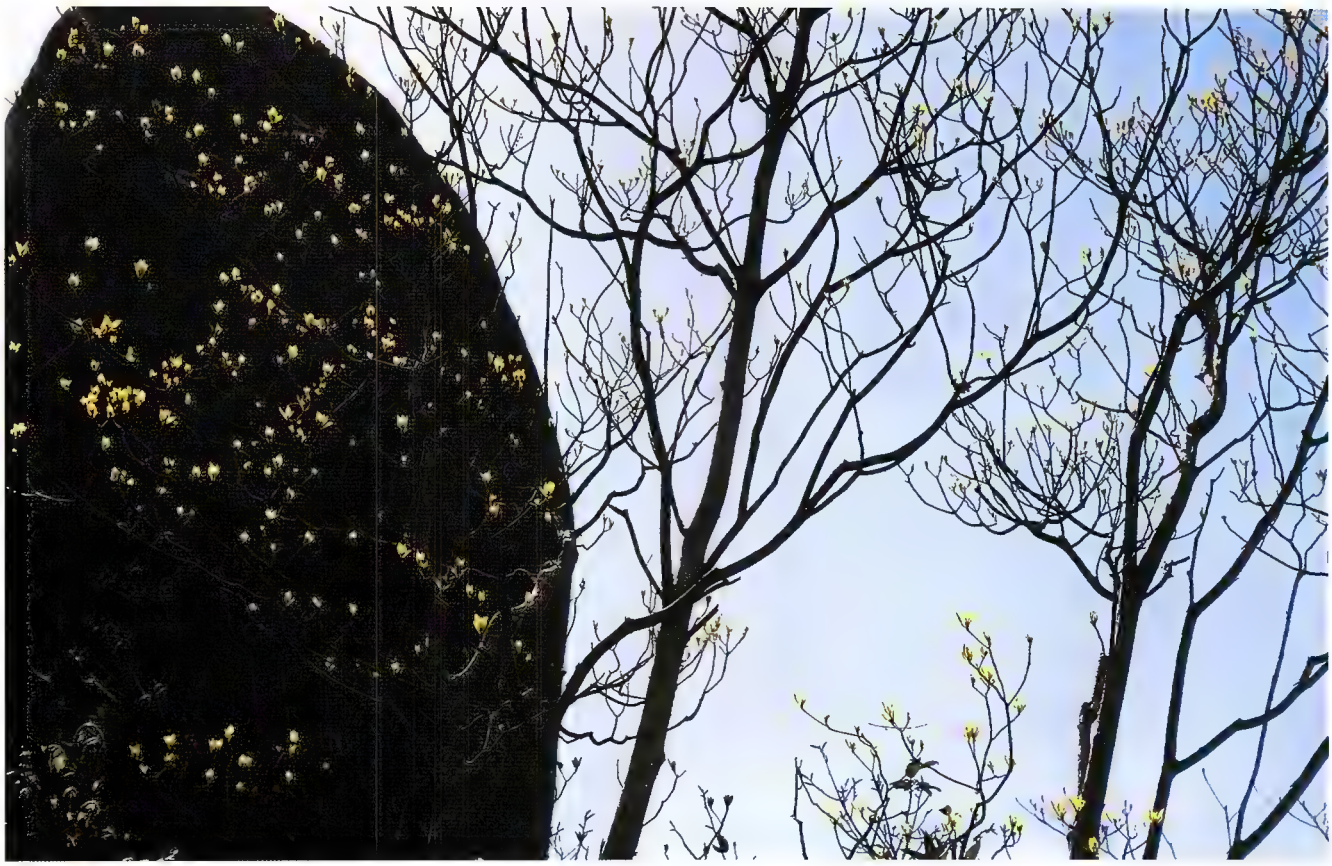


"Fairy Dew Plate" and "Immortal Turtle Exploring the Sea". Between Chengluan Gully and Fragrant Cloud Rock we saw masses of azaleas in full bloom and sturdy east China cypress trees.

Scenery in the Moonlight

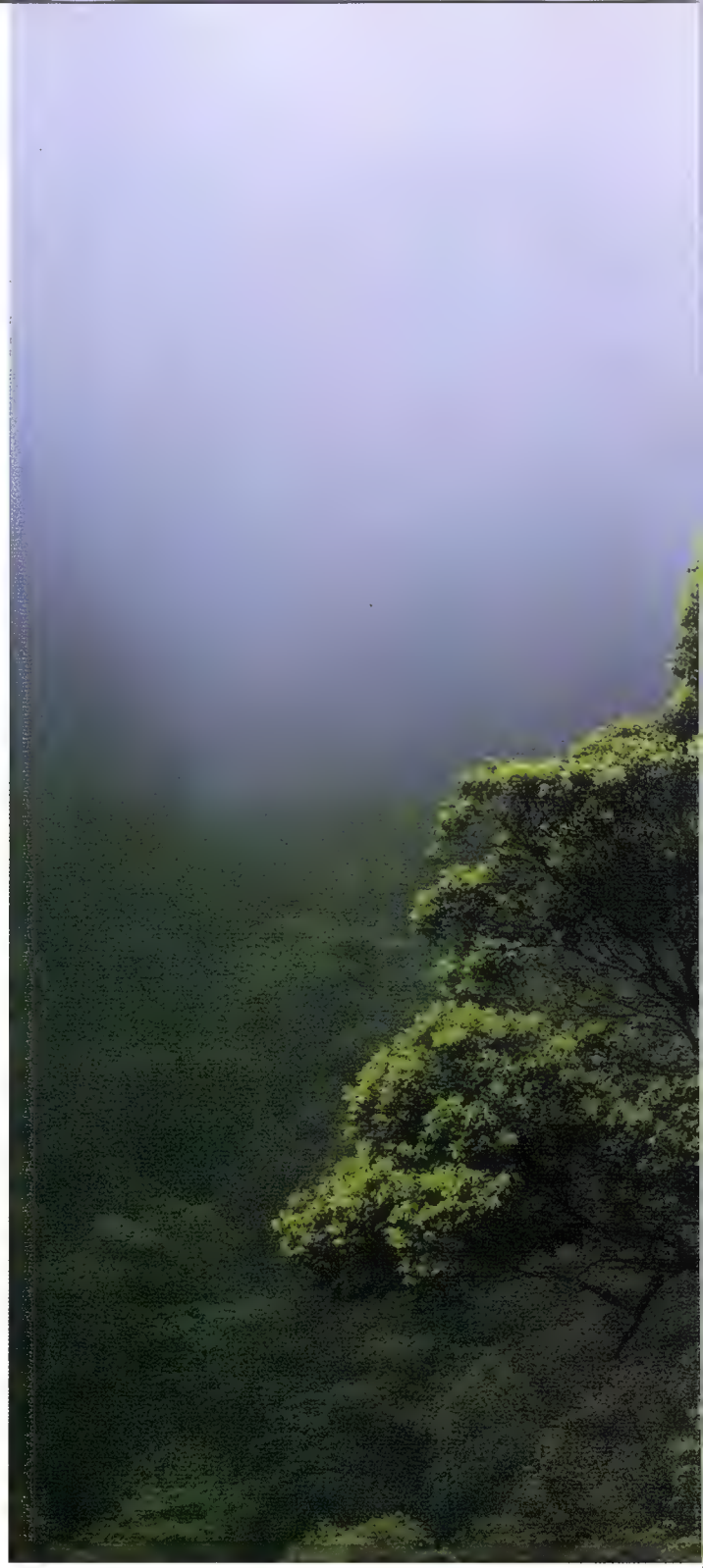
The last traces of evening glow were slowly snuffed out by the mists curling up from the valley, we quickened our pace towards the largest hotel on the mountain – the First Sanqing Mountain Guesthouse.

As we stood in the hotel lobby a gust of wind almost blew out the candles lighting the lobby. We learned that the hotel had been without electricity for several days. After a quick dinner we ascended the creaking stairs to our rooms by candlelight. I pushed open the window of my room and saw there was a full moon. It cast its silvery light over the whole mountain slope silhouetting the mountain peaks and highlighting the swaying branches of the pine trees. Everything was silent except for the gurgling of the mountain streams.

Sea of Clouds – a Fantastic Sight

When I awoke it was already daylight. We hurried to Tianmen (Heavenly Gate) Peak. As we stood on the stone cliffs a bank of clouds edged in from all sides like a long blue velvet carpet engulfing the hills and extending far into the horizon. As the sun began to rise the sea of clouds seemed to surge violently. At the very moment the sun appeared, a dazzling golden path flashed across the sea of clouds right towards our feet – we were beside ourselves with excitement. Soon

1. The Mist-shrouded peaks of the Sanqing Mountains
2. This aged pine tree on Sanqing Mountain looks very much like a dragon rearing its head. (by Liu Manling)
3. Strange-looking rocks and new shoots
4. The statue of Gate God at Xuanguan Pass
5. Sanqing Palace, rebuilt during the Ming Dynasty (by Liu Manling)
6. The Purple Smoke Rock, which is said to be where Ge Hong once tried to attain immortality and made immortal pills, is one of the best spots for viewing sunsets.



the countless waves riding the sea of clouds were tinged golden as if they were hundreds of blooming lotus flowers adrift on the wind. Mountain peaks gradually emerged from the sea of clouds to resemble immortals and fairies majestically rising up to pay homage to the Taoist gods.

Ancient Glacier Basin and Historical Taoist Traces

The Sanqing Land of Fortune surrounded by the Sanqing Mountain is a highland basin created by ancient glaciers where valuable cultural relics and historical ruins over 1,600 years old can still be found. The Sanqing Palace, rebuilt by Wang Gu during the Ming Dynasty, stands on a huge crag against the slope, facing three pools below. Right behind the temple are ancient pines believed to be over 1,000 years old.

It is said that the palace and the man-made scenery in the Sanqing Land of Fortune are laid out in the shape of the Eight Diagrams. The vast forest of Yellow Mountain Pine makes the site exceptionally rare.

The Sky-Piercing Main Peak

The main peak, Yujing, is crowned by two huge rocks surrounded by dense bamboo groves. We cut our way through the bamboo along a narrow path and ascended the first of the rocks on the west, called the Heavenly Terrace. From its summit none of the other two peaks could be seen, even the deep abyss below was completely obliterated by the thick fog.

We ventured onto the other rock with the help of some iron railings. One tale says this rock is only five metres away from the heaven and those who want to ascend can do so from this point. Sitting next to a stone called Immortals' Chess Rock, we certainly felt like we were perhaps already not too far from the land of the immortals.

Next we headed off to Nantianmen (South Heavenly Gate) which offers breathtaking views of the peaks rising up abruptly on both sides of the mountain pass. The small hotel where we stayed, Yunzhongyuan (Garden in the Clouds), was just 200 metres below the South Heavenly Gate and a corridor surrounding the hotel provided unique angles from which the various peaks could be viewed, including the Heavenly General Peak, the Huge Immortal Spirit Peak, the Thunder God Peak and the Magic Eagle Peak.

The Fairy Valley Awakening One's Imagination

The next morning we took a trip to an area called Youxian (Fairy) Valley. Walking along a path along the cliffs called Single Shot of Sky,

we found ourselves in a sea of clouds curling up from the valley below. Every now and then patches of cloud dispersed to reveal the gracefulness of the strange-looking peaks. Some of the clouds clung to the cliffs, others moved across the valley like a gust of wind. Many of the jagged cliff rocks and uniquely-shaped peaks seemed to change their appearance in the shifting clouds, creating an endless collage of pictures and awakening one's imagination.

The sun finally came out in the afternoon. Before sunset, we came to a place called Yutai (Jade Terrace) where it was said that Nu Wa who created mankind once organised people to fill up the sea and create land. Looking south-west towards Yujing Peak and the distant mountains we found ourselves viewing a contour resembling a skyline of city skyscrapers which was actually created by the many mountain ridges and peaks.

The Fairy Peak and the Pinnacle of King Yu

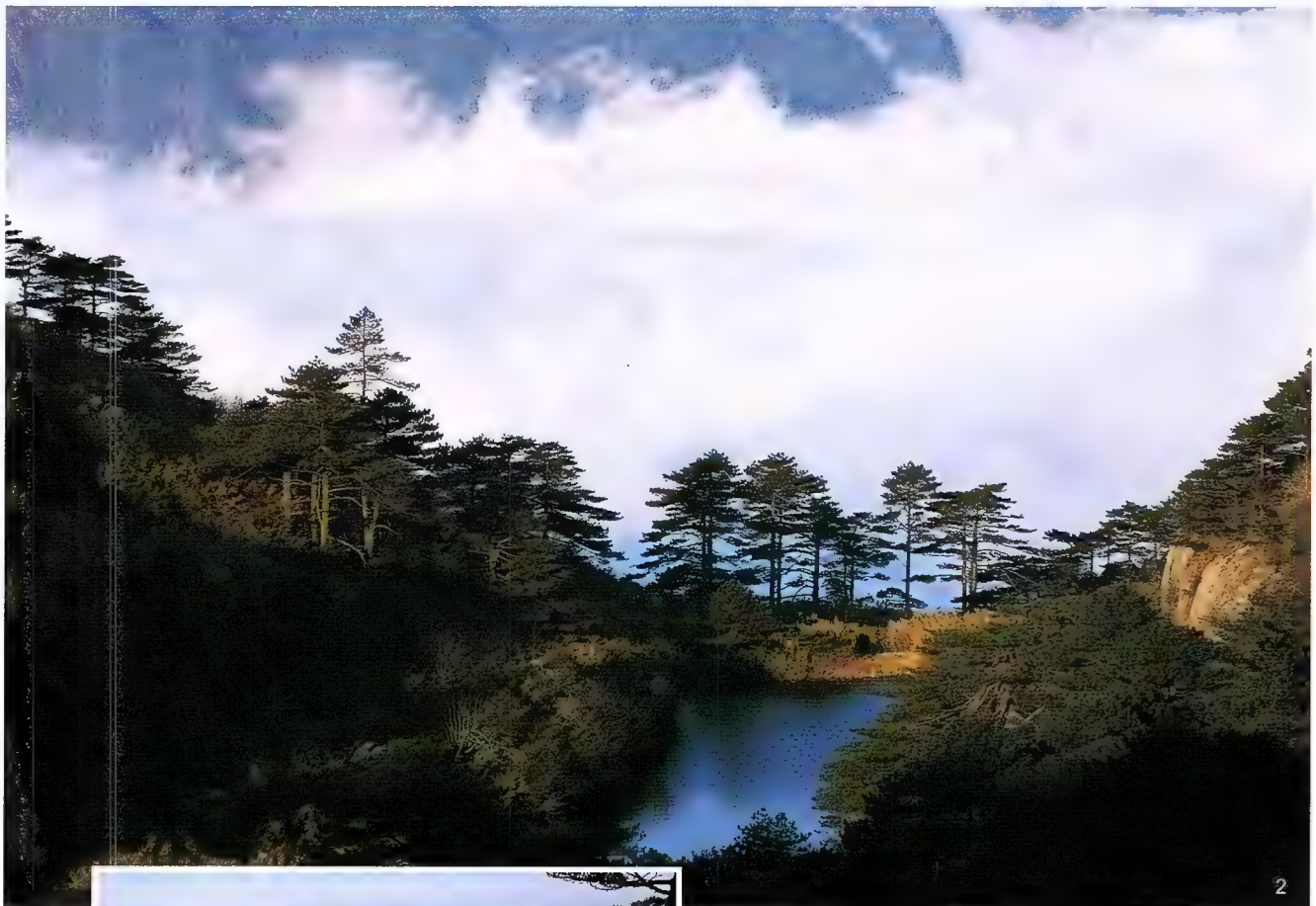
Once again we set out in the early morning. This time our destination was the scenic area in the east where we ascended the

1. Morning at Fairy Peak
2. The passageway leading to Jade Terrace and Fairy Peak is so narrow that only one person can pass through at a time – railings have been erected to prevent accidents.
3. Rare trees at Jade Ice Cave

Viewing Terrace. What makes the Fairy Peak special are the two pine trees near the summit surrounded by a large patch of azaleas. It seemed that the fairies had placed them there in order to present to mankind the promise of spring. We soon came to the foot of Yuhuangding (Pinnacle of King Yu), the highest peak within the boundary of the South Heavenly Gate. We ascended by means of a steel ladder clinging to the cliff. Again, the peak was crowned by an aged pine tree. To its south is Wotuo (Crouching Camel) Peak, to its east, the Jumang (Python) Peak, to its west, the Duxiu (Solitary Grace) Peak.

The weather had been very kind to us and on the morning of our last day in the mountain it turned out to be another fine day. The rising sun once again threw attractive coloured rays across the peaks, making us reluctant to leave. Nevertheless, we began our journey down the mountain and were truly satisfied with our trip.

Translated by F. Huang



1. After a rainstorm, the rushing water creates a melodious symphony.
2. On Sanqing Mountain, you may see tranquil pond and green slope like this everywhere.
3. The Stone Tiger attentively listening to a scripture reading in front of the Dragon and Tiger Hall

Travellers' Tips

Transport: To get to the Sanqing Mountain, one can take the train from Shanghai, Nanchang, Fuzhou, Guangzhou or Nanjing and then travel along the Zhejiang-Jiangxi Railway, getting off at Shangrao, Yushan or Quzhou stations. If using the Anhui-Jiangxi Railway, one should get off at Leping Station and continue the journey by bus. A daily bus service departs from Shangrao, Yushan and Leping railway stations to Sanqing Mountain. An alternative is to fly directly to Quzhou Airport in Zhejiang and then take a bus to Fenshui, the northern entrance to Sanqing Mountain, or to Jinsha, the eastern entrance.

Suggested Tourist Routes:

Route A: Day One: Arrive in Jinsha and check into a local hotel.

Day Two: In the morning visit scenic sites in the vicinity of Jinsha; after lunch ascend the mountain to the Wind Gate, the Sanqing Land of Fortune and watch the sunset, or the sea of clouds. Day Three: Get up very early to watch the sunrise over the sea of clouds. Then later, ascend the Yujing Peak and visit the sights along the north-south route. In the afternoon, see the peaks around the Cloud Ladder Summit such as the Fairy Peak and Python Peak. Early evening, watch the evening glow at Sanpaijian. Day Four: Watch the sunrise at Jade Terrace. After breakfast, take the cable car down the mountain. Make a stop at the fantastic site of Pipa Playing Pavilion. Take the bus to Shangrao to catch an afternoon train for your return journey.

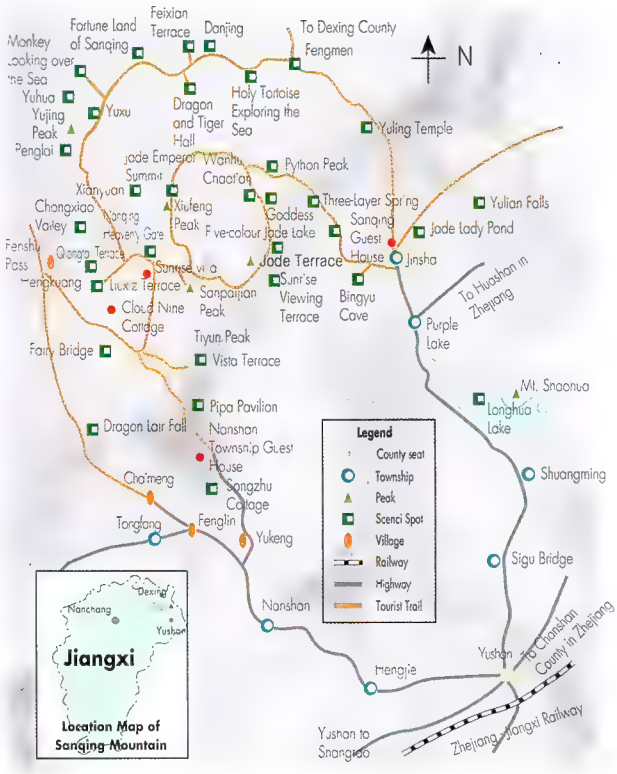
Route B: Day One: Arrive at Waishuang (Outer Double) Creeks at the southern entrance to the mountain. Visit the scenic site at Pipa Playing Pavilion. Take the cable car to the Cloud Ladder Summit and stay overnight at one of the hotels there. Day Two: Ascend the Jade Terrace to watch the sunrise. Visit the Fairy Peak, Python Peak, Pinnacle of King Yu and other sites along the route of the Magic Dragon Playing with the Pines. After lunch, visit the South Heavenly Gate, ascend the Yujing Peak and visit the scenic attractions along the route to the Sanqing Palace. In early evening, watch sunset at the Sanqing Palace. Day Three: Watch the sun rising out of the sea of clouds. Tour the Sanqing Land of Fortune in the morning and then make the trip down the mountain and see the Heavenly Gate along the way. In the afternoon, visit the attractions in the area around Jinsha and spend the night there. Day Four: Depart for Shangrao after breakfast in order to catch an afternoon train.

Notes:

*Scenic sites on Sanqing Mountain: the eastern part features rivers and creeks and distant views. The northern part is known for its pine trees, clouds and ancient architecture including stone carvings. The west section is famous for its peaks, waterfalls and trees. The southern part attracts people with strangely-shaped mountain peaks which stimulate one's imagination.

*Some of the most spectacular mountain views can be seen either at sunrise or sunset, so be prepared to get up early and stay out late in order to truly appreciate the Sanqing Mountain.

Tourist Map of Sanqing Mountain



*Peak tourist seasons are from April to May and from July to October.

Accommodation: Travellers mostly stay overnight at the Sanqing Palace (15-20 yuan per night) and Cloud Ladder Summit. Similar facilities are available at the Outer Double Creeks in the south, Jinsha in the east and Fenshui in the north, as well as in Yushan and Dexing counties and Shangrao City. The hotels are inexpensive mainly because of their limited facilities. Food is relatively expensive.

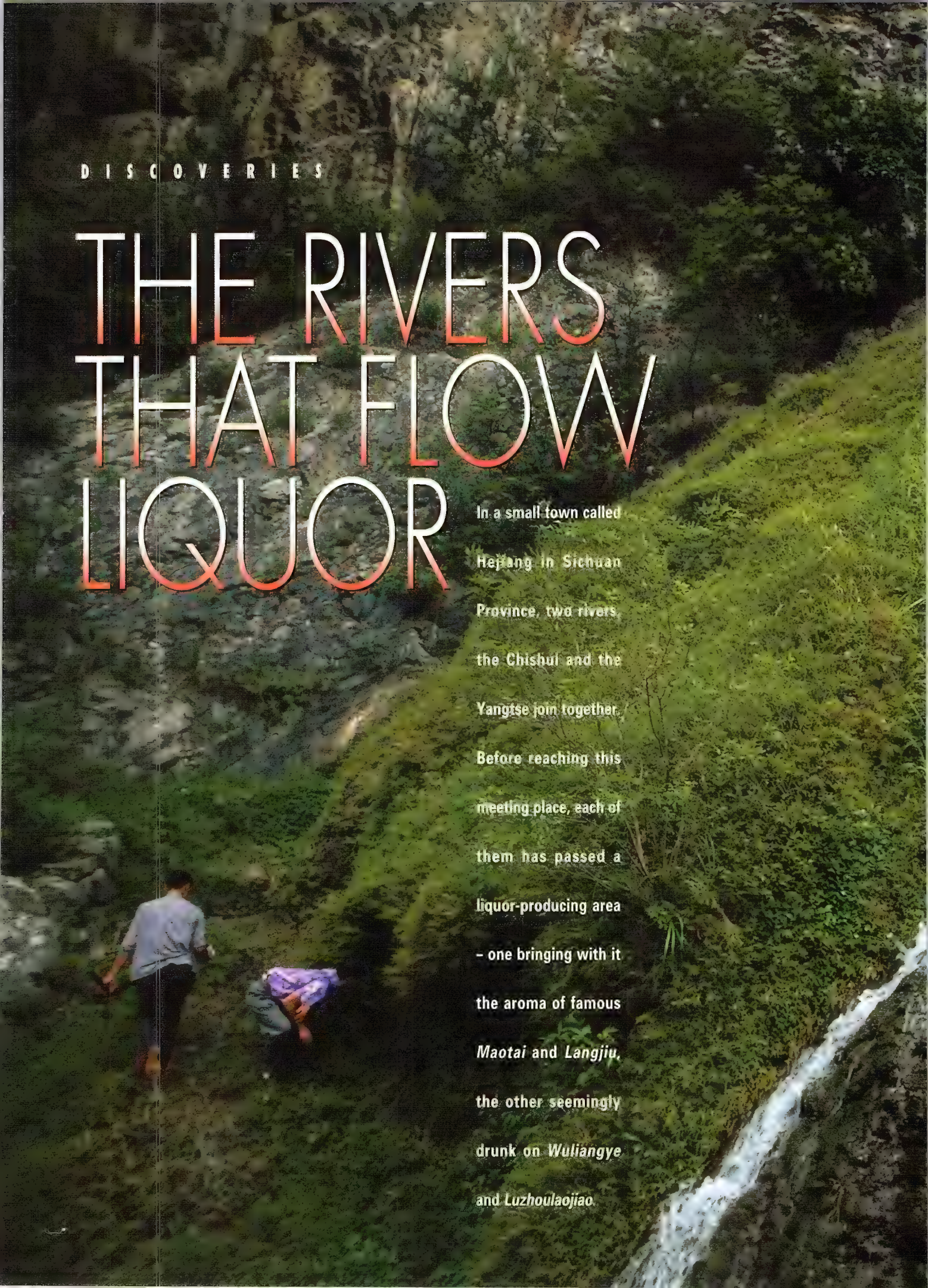
At the Cloud Ladder Summit, one can stay at the following hotels: Rishang (Sunny) Mountain Villa, the Garden in the Cloud or the Cloud Ladder Summit Hotel.

Safety: Take along comfortable walking shoes, a flashlight, an umbrella or raincoat as well as some basic medicines. Only walk along designated pathways and always stay within the railings at scenic spots. The paths through Sanqing Mountain are in good condition and well sign posted. For maximum safety, do not wander off alone or try to climb where there are no railings or footpaths.

Means of Transport: At the southern entrance to the Sanqing Mountains, a cableway transports visitors up to the Cloud Ladder Summit. At present, there are no sedan chair services. Porters can be hired to carry luggage for 5-10 yuan per piece.

Travel Service: Administrative Committee of Sanqing Mountain Scenic & Tourist Zone Shangrao, Jiangxi.
Post code: 334000 Telephone: 0793-225817

THE RIVERS THAT FLOW LIQUOR



In a small town called Hejiang in Sichuan Province, two rivers, the Chishui and the Yangtse join together. Before reaching this meeting place, each of them has passed a liquor-producing area – one bringing with it the aroma of famous *Maotai* and *Langjiu*, the other seemingly drunk on *Wuliangye* and *Luzhoulaojiao*.

Photos by Chen Jin and Peng Zhenge
Article by Ye Wen

Previous page: One of the crystal-clear streams feeding into Chishui River (by Peng Zhenge)

1. **Steep cliffs on the banks of Chishui River (by Peng Zhenge)**
2. **Rafting along the Chishui River (by Peng Zhenge)**
3. **The highway to Maotai Distillery (by Chen Jin)**
4. **A wine vessel (by Qin Ling)**
5. **Children of Erlang (by Chen Jin)**

I joined a tour group to the Chishui River which has long been associated with the legend surrounding *Maotai*, a Chinese liquor so popular that it has attained national status.

During the Qin and Han dynasties the Chishui river valley was part of the legendary Yelang Kingdom. According to historians, *Maotai* liquor first found fame in 135 B.C. when a special envoy, Tang Meng, returned from a diplomatic mission to the Nanyue Kingdom. The local people there had treated him to a drink called *Goujiang*. On his return, he presented a jar of the liquor to Emperor Wu of the Western Han Dynasty. The emperor was so impressed by its taste that he commanded that it be sent to him every year as a tribute. Historians have proved that *Goujiang*, a low-alcohol wine, originated in the Kingdom of Shu, today's Sichuan-Guizhou area.

Smashing a Bottle Earns a Gold Medal

The car journey along the Chishui River was, at times, not very pleasant because the road wriggled its way through the mountains, sometimes making life-threatening turns. At last it smoothed out into a long wide stretch and we heaved a sigh of relief as we saw the signboard reading "Maotai Avenue". Shortly after we arrived at the world-famous Maotai Distillery, our host entertained us with an anecdote about

CHINESE PEOPLE AND CHINESE LIQUOR

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China is one of the earliest countries in the world to produce wine, evident as early as 4,100 years ago. Legend has it that the first Chinese person to invent wine was a man by the name of Yi Di, yet the first man to drink wine was Yu the Great, the founder of the Xia Dynasty. The story goes like this: During the time that Yu the Great battled to tame the flooding wild rivers in the north, he asked his friend Yi Di to develop a kind of beverage which would make his workers feel warm while they toiled in the cold damp weather. Before long Yi Di succeeded and presented the liquor to Yu the Great. After drinking the liquor Yu the Great felt very relaxed and entered a state of elation, similar to one that a celestial might feel. Suddenly, an ominous thought occurred to him.... He said to his friend, "Your invention is wonderful but I fear that in the future it is bound to affect people in the wrong way and by drinking the brew someone may even bring about the downfall of the state." From that moment, Yu the Great stopped drinking and his relationship with Yi Di became estranged.

The Contribution of Dukang *Since that time, more and more people indulged in drinking wine and with it came great advancements in the technique of wine-making. Shaokang, the sixth emperor of the Xia Dynasty, developed a method by which he could produce liquor from broomcorn millet. By the Zhou Dynasty, the most important figure in wine-making history appeared on the scene, his name was Du Kang. Du's contributions to the techniques where so great that his name almost became a synonym for wine – a poem by Cao Cao, the ruler of the State of Wei in the Three Kingdoms period once wrote: "What can relieve you from sorrow? Only Du Kang."*

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By the beginning of the Zhou Dynasty liquor grew in importance to the point where it was used at important sacrificial ceremonies. In fact, a special official was appointed to take sole charge of making the wine that would be used at the ceremonies. Previously, in the Xia Dynasty, plain water was used, and in the Shang Dynasty sweet wine was used. After the Qin and Han dynasties, brewing techniques advanced even further. They diverged from using cereals as the base ingredient, and experimented by fermenting different kinds of fruit. By the Wei, Jin and Northern and Southern dynasties, people began to add medicinal herbs to the brew in order to nurture micro organisms that would aid recovery.

China did not actually produce wine from grapes until the Tang Dynasty when its army conquered the city of Gaochang and acquired some of its grape vines. Another outstanding contribution to wine-making was made during the Song Dynasty with the discovery and application of red aspergillus, used to produce a distinctive liquor flavour.

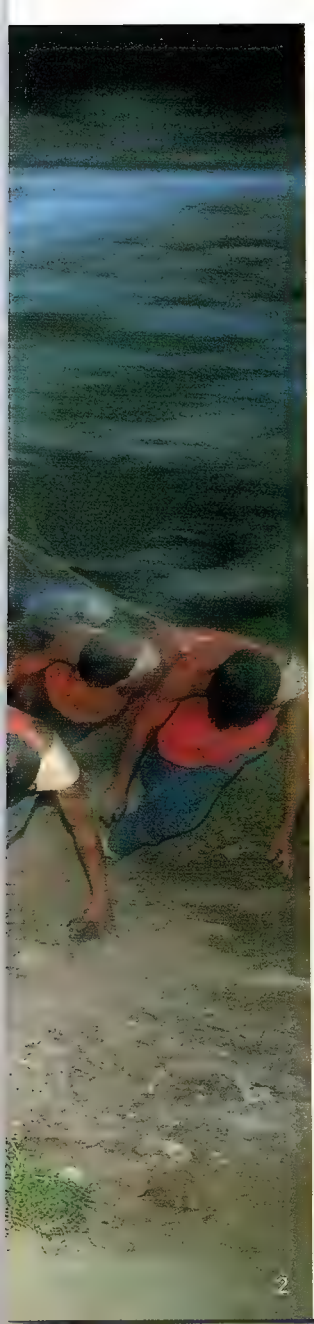
True hard spirits only appeared in China during the Yuan Dynasty and were produced from sorghum and other grains. By the Ming Dynasty even more people became fascinated with the art and began developing and improving their liquor-

their product. Apparently, the *Maotai* liquor was on display at the 1915 Panama World Liquor Fair, but it attracted little interest, perhaps because of its ugly bottles. Visitors filing past the *Maotai* booth were obviously more interested in the beverages made by other countries. The Chinese exhibitors flew into a rage. One of them took a bottle and threw it to the floor. The moment it broke the air was filled with a heady aroma and the booth was instantly mobbed by merchants. Some are even said to have dropped to their knees dipping their fingers into the spill so that they could taste the liquor. It was such a dramatic episode that by the end of the fair the Chinese were pleasantly surprised to hear that their product *Maotai* was a gold medal winner.

The warm, moist climate of Maotai Town has endowed the local cellars with a unique micro organism. Because of this fact alone it would be impossible to reproduce Maotai anywhere else in the world. In addition, the water comes from a single source hidden in a deep ravine skirted by high mountains; moreover, *Maotai* can be made only from the locally grown wheat. The yeast has to be produced during the period which extends from the Dragon Boat Festival (the fifth day of the fifth lunar month) to the Double-Nine Festival (the ninth day of the ninth lunar month), and fermentation has to begin after the Double-Nine Festival. The liquid produced is then sealed into the pot-stills and stored in the

1. Steps leading down to an ancient quay (by Peng Zhenge)
2. Boat trackers on the Chishui River (by Peng Zhenge)
3. A Han-dynasty stone carving depicting the wine making process (by Chen Jin)

making techniques. The most famous liquor during that time was one produced in Xiangling, whose distillation techniques were a closely guarded secret. By the Qing Dynasty, the liquor produced in Cangzhou, Hebei Province, became extremely famous. Today, China produces a number of famous brands of liquor in massive quantities, among them are Shaoxing Wine, Maotai, Wuliangye, Zhuyeqing, and many others.



The Bond Between Liquor and Culture *Wine has played a fairly significant role throughout Chinese history, however, there were also occasions on which drinking has caused harm not only to the people, but to governments and even to the state. Thus, various dynasties instituted laws banning its consumption. For example, the Zhou Dynasty stipulated that drunkards found wandering through the streets were to be banned and persecuted. In the Han Dynasty, Xiao He, the prime minister, once made a proclamation: "Group drinking by more than three people will be fined four taels of gold". Later, a monopolised sales system was established for wine. Since the Han Dynasty, the government had levied taxes on the sale of wine.*

An indissoluble bond has long existed between Chinese liquor and the Chinese culture: medicinal herbs soaked in liquor are said to cure diseases and build up a good physique; famous poets have produced oft-quoted poems after bouts of drinking; games or drinkers' wagers have existed in China since antiquity – all these reflect the culture that has sprung up since drinking wine became popular. It is said that the earliest wager for drinkers was used to penalise guests who arrived late at banquets. Over time, it has turned into a kind of recreational activity. In ancient times, most drinking games at banquets were in the form of linking verses: each of the drinkers had to compose one or two lines in turn to form a poem on a certain subject, similar to a quiz game. Those who were unable to come up with the right lines would have to drink.

Innumerable stories surround the history of wine. Many great events are related to wine and in literature many special history books, classical works and guidebooks have been produced on the subject of wine. The literati of the time became friends through drinking together and gave themselves wine-related names; together they not only drank wine but also left behind numerous poems and essays.

Li Bai, the most celebrated Tang Dynasty poet, wrote more than 900 poems, over 70 of which were related to wine, thus earning himself the title "Celestial of Wine". A poem by Du Fu says, "With a dou of wine Li Bai could produce 100 poems; getting himself drunk, he slept in wine shops in the marketplace in Chang'an." Wine was also Li Bai's downfall.... History books record that he met his death on a boat travelling along the Caishi River, he was so heavily drunk that he plunged into the water to "catch

purpose-built cellars for 20-30 years before it is blended by experts to produce the characteristic flavour of *Maotai* wine. The end-product is then bottled and shipped out for sale.

By-Products Used as Chicken Feed

We found that the road crossing Chishui River and leading to Sichuan Province on the opposite side of the river was always full of people laden with sacks. They turned out to be vendors who had come all the way from Sichuan Province in order to purchase the distiller's waste grain, which apparently makes excellent chicken feed. Back home they can sell each sack for 10 yuan.

Rise in Popularity of Langjiu Liquor

As we were crossing the Chishui River, the junkmen sang: "Maotai is situated up the river while down the river is Luzhou; when the boat sails past Er'lang Shoal, it is time to drink the *Langjiu* liquor." One sailor told us that because of the truculent shoals and torrential water along this stretch of 30 kilometres, no boat has ever sailed through the Er'lang Shoal. During the reign of Emperor Qianlong of the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) the emperor earmarked several thousand taels of silver to dredge this section of the river so that the salt could be shipped to the mountainous hinterland of Guizhou. The project fell through, and as a result it had to be backpacked to Masangping in order to by-pass the shoals. It was then loaded onto another ship to be shipped further down the river. As time went on, Er'lang Town in Gulin County, Sichuan Province, emerged as the largest salt shipping centre on the Chishui River, which once boasted more than a hundred salt dealing companies. This explains why in the old days, Er'lang Town had a Temple of the God of Salt constructed. Later, when the route for the salt shipments changed, Er'lang Town gradually lost importance. However, the ancient town was given a new lease of life with the emergence of *Langjiu*, another of China's famous alcohols.

Like the Maotai Distillery, the Langjiu Distillery is a modern multi-million dollar enterprise tucked away in a narrow valley. All kinds of luxury cars can be seen scuttling to and fro along the modern expressway conducting to the distillery, and a newly-built bridge links the Langjiu Distillery with the Xijiu Distillery of Guizhou Province on the other side of the river.

Liaison Between Maotai and Langjiu

Having checked into a hotel in Er'lang Town, we went to a small restaurant to have a drink. While nursing a cup of *Langjiu* the locals told us about the town's history. During the period which saw the fall of the Qing Dynasty and the rise of the Republic, the town was home to 20 or more private distilleries and

1. Fermentation workshop of the Maotai Distillery (by Zhang Jinneng)
2. One of the many small liquor workshops along the Chishui River (by Peng Zhenge)
3. One of the Langjiu Distillery's cellars (by Zhang Jinneng)
4. Wine pot and cups used by the Yi people (by Wang Miao)
5. A Song-dynasty sculpture depicting a girl serving wine (by Chen Jin)

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5

the moon" and thus drowned himself.

In the early period of the Tang Dynasty, there was another famous man of letters called Hu Chubin. He had a very facile imagination, yet, he could not produce a good piece without the aid of wine. Whenever Emperor Gaozong asked him to write a composition, Hu would be served large quantities of wine in gold and silver wine cups so that he could keep the cups as gifts. However, Hu would exchange the precious cups for more wine. Once he had spent all his money on wine, he would appear before the emperor again, waiting for another assignment.

The Historical Roles of Wine

In China, wine plays an important role in all kinds of rituals. In ancient times, sacrifices to supernatural beings and ancestors were made by silently reciting solemn prayers. Wine was then poured in three dots, and the remainder scattered in a semi-circle to form the character "heart", symbolising that the respect being shown for the supernatural beings or ancestors came from the heart. Toasting also derived from an ancient practice, one would have to drink first to show respect, those who were being toasted would have to reciprocate, it would be considered ill-mannered not to do so. Up until today, wine is still indispensable on occasions such as weddings, reunions, farewells, birthdays, victory celebrations, funerals and at banquets. In the Shaoxing area in Zhejiang Province, an interesting custom takes place with new-born babies: at the birth of their baby, the parents place several jars of wine into their cellar where it is left until the child is ready to get married. The wine is then taken out of the cellar and served at the wedding banquet. The wine kept for a daughter is called "the Girl's Wine", and that kept for a son is called "the Number One Scholar Red".

In Chinese history, there are also close ties between wine and political figures of the time. In the Three Kingdoms period, for example, Cao Cao was recorded to have been drinking warmed wine with Liu Bei while he named the people whom he considered heroes of his time – he named Liu Bei as one of them; Zhou Yu, commander of the army of the State of Wu, faked being drunk to lure Jiang Gan, the spy of the State of Wei, into a trap.

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workshops. The most famous and largest of these was the Huichuan Distillery. With workshops covering a floor space of 2,000 square metres, it was the leading distillery in the Chishui river valley.

During the 1930s, the jointly-owned Jiyi Distillery was founded in Er'lang Town and quickly managed to create a roaring business. Then, two events happened in its favour: firstly, it happened that the largest liquor-maker in Maotai Town, the Chengyi Distillery, was burned down by a fire, enabling the Jiyi Distillery to acquire its chief engineer; secondly, the chief distiller of the Huichuan Distillery decided to join them. As a result, Jiyi Distillery thrived and it eventually named its hallmark product *Langjiu*.

Younger generation drinkers often find it difficult to tell the difference between *Maotai* and *Langjiu*. In fact by the 1930s liquor connoisseurs had already discovered that there was a similarity between the two, probably because the chief distiller of *Langjiu* came from the Maotai distillery. Later, when the Chengyi Distillery began operations again the engineer returned there to make *Maotai* liquor using the yeast he had brought back from the Langjiu distillery. As a result, *Maotai* acquired a *Langjiu* taste and vice versa. However, there is a theory that *Langjiu* has a sweeter aroma, while *Maotai* has a better, more lingering taste. The similarity is so close that, it is said, the general engineer of the Maotai Distillery apparently mistook *Langjiu* for *Maotai* during a national liquor appraisal conference!

Cave Cellars of Langjiu

The lack of space in Er'lang Town prompted managers of the Langjiu Distillery to look to the mountains for more space. They proceeded to use two huge existing caves in the mountain and converted them into liquor cellars the likes of which had never been heard of before. The relative stable conditions inside the caves in terms of temperature and moisture have been conducive to the growth of micro organisms, thereby raising the quality of Langjiu liquor to a new heights. Managers also find the cave cellars safe, clean and easy to manage. Inside the caves, I smelled the delicate aroma in the air and

1. Liquor jars like this are seen everywhere in Tucheng Town. (by Lai Wu)
2. The old ferry of Yibin (by Chen Jin)
3. Residential buildings of Hejiang (by Zhang Jinneng)
4. A stone carving found in Luzhou (by Chen Jin)

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USEFUL INFORMATION

Aromatic Liquors:

Maotai *is a good example of a sauce-like liquor with an aroma similar to fermented beans – the smell is so strong it lingers overnight.*

Luzhou Laojiao *and* ***Wuliangye*** *are representative liquors with a strong aroma mainly deriving from acetic acid.*

Fenjiu *from Shanxi is a liquor with a faint aroma, characteristic of a traditional spirit. The flavour is mellow and pure.*

Guilin Sanhua *(Three-Flower) wine is a good example of a liquor tasting of rice: the bouquet gives off a soft, sweet aroma similar to honey.*

Apart from the above-mentioned, other types are Dongjiu (produced in Guizhou) and Baishaye (produced in Changsha of Hunan).

Ancient Wine Vessels:

In ancient China a peculiar custom existed whereby guests attending a banquet could only begin to discuss serious matters after they had drunk three rounds of alcohol – a jiuchou, *an instrument made of either bamboo or timber, was used by the wine pourers to keep count of the rounds served.*

Zun *– a wine vessel with a large opening, used at banquets and dinners.*

Dou *– a wine vessel with a fairly large capacity.*

Jue *– a bird-like, open-mouthed wine vessel with three legs, used on ceremonial occasions.*

Gong *– a flat-bottomed open-mouthed vessel with a handle.*

3

Translated by Li Zhenguo

by the dim light I could see the neat rows of pot-stills arranged in strict chronological order.

High-Quality Liquor of Small Workshops

The banks of the Chishui River are lined with numerous tiny towns and whenever we arrived at one we would stop to taste the local liquor and visit the local fair. During these sojourns we were always impressed by the time-honoured traditions and the honest hardworking folk. Tucheng is one such small town with a population of only several hundred. Yet at least eight distilleries clustered its main street apparently unperturbed about outstripping demand for the single reason that their liquor, as a rule, is cheap yet of high quality. On any market day the owners never fail to attract a constant stream of buyers. Local peasants coming to town to sell their farm produce usually return home with a bottle or two of liquor purchased from one of the distilleries. Also, large distilleries often buy-off what their smaller counterparts have to offer in order to make up their own production shortage.

Old Distiller's Trick

In Fubao Town, situated where the Chishui River empties itself into the Yangtse River, we checked into a small in and found Master Liu's Distillery where we were offered free drinks. "My liquor stands comparable with *Maotai*, *Wuliangye* and *Luzhoulaojiao*," Liu, the owner said. "You'll get used to it after you've drunk a few cups." I learnt from his wife that offering free drinks had been an old trick employed by his father to promote sales. Guests to the town would drink to their heart's content assuming it was free whereas the reality was that they had to pay for it. Those who became addicted to his brew would always return for more and in this way his distillery flourished. While his wife runs the wine shop, Liu himself oversees the operation of the distillery which covers about 100 square metres to the rear of the house.

Competition Between Twin Cities

The Chishui River runs almost parallel with the Yangtse for more than 100 kilometres before emptying into it. Hemmed in between the two rivers are the towns of Luzhou and Yibin, renowned in China for their liquor-distillation. The Luzhoulaojiao produced in Luzhou and Wuliangye made in Yibin are both liquors enjoying high prestige, which have carved up a considerable share of the Chinese liquor market. Together with Maotai and Langjiu, they are often found at official or family dinners in China. Naturally, both cities are enjoying the rewards of this thriving liquor business.

Both cities claim that they have liquor cellars dating back more than a thousand years and are locked in keen competition. For example, Yibin was the first to call itself "City of Liquor" – not to be outdone, Luzhou immediately followed suit by calling itself "Capital of Liquor". Benefited from their liquor production, both cities have succeeded in boosting local development and improving the lot of the local people.

1. The 600-year-old Wuliangye Distillery (by Chen Jin)
2. Maotai Town viewed from a distance (by Chen Jin)
3. Market day in Hema Town, Guizhou (by Peng Zhenge)

Translated by Ling Yuan

TRAVELLERS' TIPS

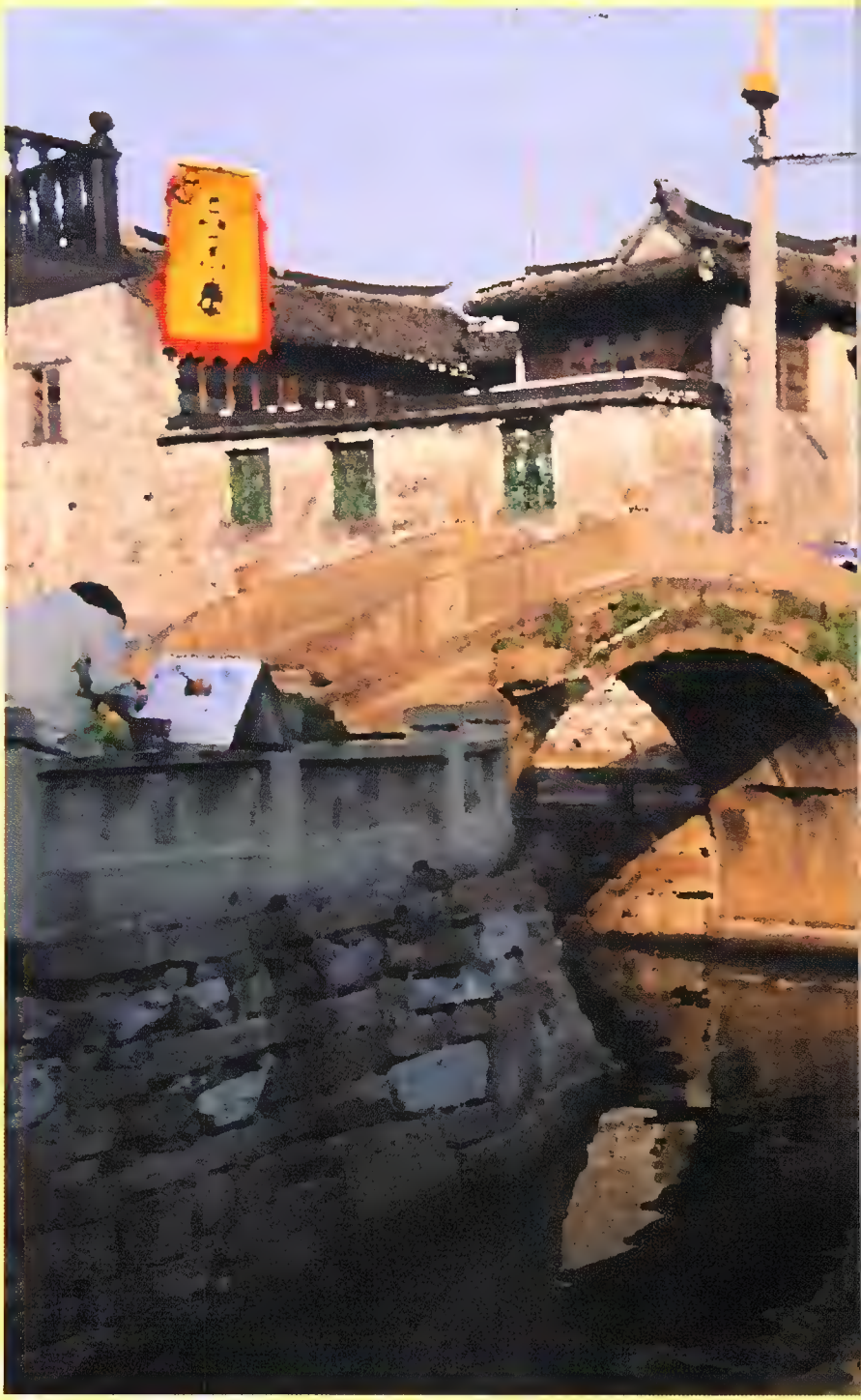
Starting from Hejiang in Sichuan Province, two river sections are particularly well-known for the famous liquors they produce: One is the Yibin-Hejiang section on the upper reaches of the Yangtse River which is famous for producing two brands of liquor – Wuliangye *and* Luzhou Laojiao*; the other is the Renhuai-Hejiang section of the Chishui River which is well-known for its* Maotai *and* Langjiu *liquors. The area also produces many other famous liquors, such as* Xishui Daqu *and* Dongjiu. *It is therefore with good reason that these two sections are called "national liquor rivers".*

In order to follow this liquor trail one should first get to Guiyang by air and then travel to Zunyi by train. Zunyi is a famous historical city and, once there, one can visit some of the many tourist attractions, such as the site of the Zunyi Meeting (an important meeting held during the famous Long March), Xiangshan Temple, Zhengmo Hall and Hailong Cofferdam. From Zunyi, one takes a bus or taxi to Renhuai County, to the Maotai Wine Culture and Tourist Zone, where the Museum of Wine Culture is worth a visit. Within the boundaries of the county, there are other charming tourist spots including the Huaiyang Hot Spring, the Changgang Karst Caves and the Luoshui Cave. Facing Maotai Town across the river is the famous Er'lang Town in Sichuan, which produces Langjiu and is also worth a visit. If one is travelling by car or jeep, one can easily make a small detour down to the Chishui River to visit some of the small rural townships such as Sanhe, Tucheng and Xishui. Chishui City is famous for being the place where the Red Army crossed the river four times during the Long March. The city also enjoys stretches of beautiful natural landscape and numerous waterfalls waiting to be discovered. The most well-known of these are the Shizhang Cave and Zhongdong Cave.

At Hejiang the Chishui River pours into the Yangtse River. Nestled nearby is an quaint ancient town called Fulu. From here one can then travel up along the Yangtse River to Luzhou to visit the liquor distilleries, the Jiushi Scenic Resort and Zhongshan Scenic Area. From Luzhou, one can then take a bus to Yibin where places of interest include Cuiping Hill on the city's northern outskirts, Liubei Pool and Jiuzhou Tower on the northern bank of the river. Of course, one also needs set aside some time in order to learn about the famous Wuliangye.

Whilst visiting the various distilleries, one should bear in mind that although most of the enjoyment comes from tasting each of the various brews, it is easy to become intoxicated, not only from the liquor itself but also from the fumes!

Finding adequate accommodation and somewhere to eat is easy in Zunyi, Maotai Town, Er'lang Town, Chishui, Luzhou and Yibin. However, in the smaller, rural towns conditions become a little poorer.



ZHOUZHUANG – A SMALL ANCIENT TOWN IN SOUTHEAST CHINA

Article & Photos by Xie Guanghui

Like a Lotus Leaf Floating on a Lake

A young Chinese painter, by the name of Chen Yifei, finally realised a dream when in October 1984 the well-known Hammer Gallery in the United States, exhibited his oil paintings. Of the 37 paintings exhibited one was particularly striking – *Hometown Memories*, which was based on the Twin Bridges of Zhouzhuang Town. Using fading shades of grey Chen had managed to capture the haunting atmosphere of the old bridge, thereby transporting the American audience to the ancient, mysterious town in Southeast China.... A month later Mr. Hammer, the owner of the gallery, bought the painting himself and gave it to Deng Xiaoping as a gift while on a visit to China.

On May 10 the following year, *Hometown Memories* was used by the United Nations as their first-day stamp cover. People around the world became aware of the small town steeped in history and full of traditional ancient buildings. They were even more surprised to discover that it lay so close to the busy cities of Shanghai and Suzhou.

In fact, even before *Hometown Memories* became famous, another well-known painter by the name of Wu Guanzhong who had also visited Zhouzhuang, made the comment, "Mount Huangshan concentrates the beauty of all the mountains in China, while Zhouzhuang concentrates the beauty of all the river towns in China."

The small town of Zhouzhuang in Kunshan City of Jiangsu Province is surrounded by patches of water in the form of Chenghu Lake, Baixian Lake, Dingshan Lake and Nanhu Lake. Similar to visiting other river towns the best way to get there is, of courses, by boat. After visiting the elegant Grand View Garden, we hired a row boat from the south-east bank of Dingshan Lake and began our journey to Zhouzhuang. The boat crossed a huge lake and then glided into an area criss-crossed by waterways. There were no roads here, only stretches of low banks between fields. As we moved on, these waterways gradually became narrower, and the wide expanse of fields became dotted with houses, most of which had a flight of steps leading down to the water's edge.

We arrived in Zhouzhuang. Women wearing brightly coloured scarves sat on their private dock washing rice and vegetables, presumably in preparation for their meals that day.

Four rivers cut the ancient town into eight waterways along which row upon row of wooden two-storey houses line each bank. As we glided along the canals, we admired the elegantly arched ancient stone bridges span the water ways. Bamboo rods projected across the windows supported swathes of washing hung out to dry. Their colours reflecting in the water to form shaky abstract images. Occasionally, we heard a splash as empty buckets were being thrown out of an upstairs window to fetch up water. Floating grocery boats loaded with seafood, fish, lotus roots and water chestnuts were selling their produce using a bamboo basket to exchange the money and goods.

Previous page, Left: Houses by the rivers are mostly two storeys high, with wooden ladders inside.
Previous page, Right: In this ancient town of rivers and lakes, over half of the buildings belong to the Ming, Qing and Republic periods.
1. A Zhouzhuang girl
2. Carrying water to the fields
3. Weaving fishing nets
4. In Spring, the rape flowers are in full bloom.

The Small Town's God of Wealth

Our boat passed under a few stone bridges and anchored at the dock of Shen Mansion. This was once the private house of the richest man in Zhouzhuang. He was called Shen Wansan and lived in the early years of the Ming Dynasty. It was because of this man that the small town became famous and his story is told to tourists even today. The tale goes that Shen Wansan turned Zhouzhuang into a prosperous market and trading port. Using the Yangtse River and Hangzhou Bay as outlets, he exported silk, porcelain, pottery, grain and handicrafts from Hangzhou, Jiaxing, Huzhou, Suzhou and Wuxi along the Beijing–Hangzhou Grand Canal and the Liuhe River in the north-east and became very successful.

Tying up our boat , we walked up the steps towards the gate of the Shen Mansion. We passed a series of gates, halls and towers, all of which are interconnected by corridors, forming an enclosed compound. The large pillars inside the main hall, Songmao (Pine Prosperous) Hall, are beautifully carved with dragons, *qilin* (a mythical beast), cranes and phoenix. The brick-arched gate tower contains carvings of lotus flowers on both sides and on the lower five-layers of brick are carvings of figurines, animals and buildings, depicted in operas such as *West Chamber* and *Scholar Riding a Horse*. The wooden structure of the main hall belongs to the Ming architecture with its exquisite balustrades and window frames designed in the Anhui style. In all, the mansion is quite modest considering the wealth of Shen. During the period covering the end of the Yuan Dynasty and the beginning of the Ming Dynasty rich businessmen did not dare show off their wealth unless they enjoyed the protection of politicians. Shen was very aware of this, but he finally met his end in the capital Nanjing. As the story goes, once the Ming emperor Zhu Yuanzhang established his capital in Nanjing, he gave orders to collect money from the people in order to build city walls. Shen, being the richest man in the area, was of course the first to make a donation. In fact he promised to build one-third of the walls from Hongwu Gate to Shuixi Gate. This news shocked everyone in Nanjing. As the saying goes, "a big tree catches the wind", meaning one should never flaunt one's wealth. Instead of being pleased, the emperor was very angry with him and gave the order to have him executed. For some reason Shen managed to avoid the death penalty and was instead sent into exile in Yunnan Province. However, Shen never got there, he met his death somewhere on the south-western border. The Shen Mansion then went into decline and the small town slipped into silence.

1. Seeing the smiles of the local people, we know they are living a better life.
2. Most of the houses in Zhouzhuang are built at the water's edge, so every household has its own dock.
3. Water lanes in Zhouzhuang
4. Touring Zhouzhuang by rowing a boat gives a real feel for the town's character.

A Fascinating Water Town

Walking through the small town one comes across enchanting scenes of women washing clothes at a dockside or by the old stone bridges; old folk sitting in front of their homes smiling and nodding. People are so friendly that they may even invite you into their homes to take a rest and have a cup of tea. Proud of their town they are keen to point out the local sights.

Zhouzhuang is a truly beautiful water town by day but becomes even more interesting by night. As darkness falls, the moon seems to hover over the tree tops and a mist rises up from the water to enshroud the whole town. That evening I sat in the Shen Mansion Restaurant by a window overlooking the river. I dined on the famous local dish of Braised Perch with Water-shield about which there is a tale: a Jin-dynasty scholar, Zhang Jiying, lived in Zhouzhuang for a long time simply because he enjoyed eating the perch so much.

After supper, I took a stroll along a stone path heading to the northern end of the town where the clear Yinzibang and Nanbeishi rivers join to form a cross. An arched stone bridge and a stone slab bridge span the two rivers to form another cross, leaving a square and round opening to resemble a key from the old days, hence the name, Key Bridges. Also called Twin Bridges the scene is exactly dipicted in Chen Yifei's *Hometown Memories*.

I stopped on the bridge to gaze at the moonlight shimmering on the water, which mingled with the reflection of lights from the riverside houses to form a beautiful colour spectrum. Crossing the bridge, I walked into a small street, which was so narrow that the sky became a thin strip. The shops on either side of the street are mostly ancient wooden structures. The sound of a middle-aged man using an abacus resounded in the street, adding further to the ancient atmosphere. Where the street comes to dead end, there is a stone bridge across to the other side. At the western side of Zhenfeng Bridge in Xishi Street, I stopped in front of a building called "Milou". It was a two-storey wooden house. Although the walls were peeling, its original look had been retained. Half a century ago, members of the Southern Literary Society often gathered here, drinking wine and composing poems. On display today are several wax figures representing the society members.

Beside Puqing Bridge is a teahouse where the local men and women gather to sip tea together. There is tea for all occasions: "Old Women Tea" (drunk by the old women), "Wedding Tea", "Spring Tea", "One Month Birthday Tea" and others. One woman told me that Zhouzhuang also had a "Settling Dispute Tea". Anyone who has a dispute would meet at the teahouse to talk – after copious cups of tea their disputes would eventually be settled. Even if they arrived fighting and cursing each other, once inside the teahouse they would quieten down as if entering a court.

Translated by M.Q.

1. The crucian carp weighs a half kilo.
2. Being surrounded by water, raising ducks in Zhouzhuang is another way to earn a good living.
3. Zhouzhuang epitomises the beauty of all riverside-towns – so it is an ideal place for artists.
4. A local farmer selling vegetables in the streets

Travellers' Tips

Zhouzhuang is an ancient town of rivers and lakes in Kunshan, Jiangsu Province. It is surrounded by the four lakes of Chenghu, Baixian, Dingshan and Nanhu, and neighbours Wujiang of Jiangsu and Qingpu of Shanghai. It lies 6 kilometres from the Dingshan Lake Grand View Scenic Area of Shanghai and 20 kilometres from Suzhou. Long-distance buses run regularly between Shanghai–Zhouzhuang and Suzhou–Zhouzhuang. Most tourists from Shanghai change bus at Qingpu. Those coming from Suzhou usually travel to Kunshan first. Every 30 minutes there is a mini-bus between Kunshan–Zhouzhuang and Qingpu–Zhouzhuang. Small boats can be hired from the local farmers at Dingshan Lake in the Grand View Scenic Area for about 50 yuan.

Zhouzhuang is surrounded by water. The four criss-crossing rivers: Nanbeishi, Hougang, Youdongyang and Zhongshi, divide the ancient town into eight long streets. One can hire a boat at Shen Mansion Dock to tour the town by its waterways. The price is 60 yuan per boat (each boat holds 8 people). The one rowing the boat also acts as a guide for you. They are usually women dressed in their typical local costume of flowery headgear and aprons. Some even sing folk songs for you. One day is usually enough to visit the town, but you may also wish to hire a boat to continue your journey to the small town of Tongli which provides a totally different experience.

Food: There are many restaurants in Zhouzhuang specialising in the local cuisine. The most famous is Shen Mansion Restaurant which offers specialities such as Pork Tendons, Braised Perch with Water-shield, Smoked Soya-beans, Three-flavour Balls, and Fresh-water Crabs. The most famous dish is Braised Perch with Water-shield, but the perch are becoming rare nowadays and so it is only served on special occasions. The local crab costs about 300 yuan per kg and comes into season in late Autumn.

Accommodation: Of the many hotels the best are Shenjiang Hotel and Zhouzhuang Hotel with room rates at about 200 yuan. If you want to live like the locals, try one of the small inns by the river, however the rooms are not equipped with baths, and only electric fans are

provided in summer. They are quite clean, and prices are reasonable – about 40 yuan per room.

Weather: Zhouzhuang enjoys a mild climate with annual temperatures averaging 15°C. It is suitable to visit the area all year round, but spring is the most beautiful.

Tourist route: Below we suggest a four-day itinerary to the area taking in Shanghai, Zhouzhuang, Suzhou and Hangzhou.

For most tourists, the ideal route into Zhouzhuang is from Shanghai. One can spend the first night in Shanghai taking the one-and-a-half-hour bus ride to Zhouzhuang the next morning. Alternatively, one can fly from Hongqiao Airport directly to Zhouzhuang.

One usually needs to allow anywhere between half a day to a full day to tour Zhouzhuang, staying overnight in nearby Suzhou. On the third day, a visit to a few of the beautiful gardens in Suzhou is a very pleasant way to spend the day, taking the night-sleeper passenger boat from Suzhou to Hangzhou down the Grand Canal. One arrives in Hangzhou before dawn.

1. Listening to storytelling and ballad singing in the soft tones of a Suzhou dialect is especially pleasant while floating along the waterways.
2. Here in Zhouzhuang, the Dragon-lantern dance is performed by women.
3. Twin Bridges – the focus of Chen Yifei's painting *Hometown Memories*
4. The choice of souvenirs in Zhouzhuang is vast.

TAIYUAN WHEATEN FOOD SHOP

Some people say that China has the best food in the world and that within China Shanxi produces the best wheaten dishes. The restaurant considered to be the "kingdom of wheaten food", is the Taiyuan Wheaten Food Restaurant.

The recently renovated restaurant is situated on the Jiefang (Liberation) Road. Above its antique gateway hangs a gold-plated signboard with the characters "Taiyuan Wheaten Food Restaurant". On either side of the gateway is a couplet which reads "*Camel humps and bear's paws are nothing to be proud of, mao'erduo and boyu'r are inexpensive yet luxurious*", in the handwritings of Lao She and his wife Hu Jieqing.

1

All the walls of its spacious halls are covered with paintings, poems and calligraphic works extolling the virtures of wheaten food and other Shanxi delicacies. "*Rice, flour, meat, chicken and fish, everything does not come easily; Sour, Sweat, bitter, hot and salty: each drop must be accurate.* The shop owner , Mr Song, has worked hard to create a plain yet elegant cultural atmosphere so that customers can understand the unsophisticated nature of the Shanxi people and thereby appreciate the elegance of a culture nurtured by the Yellow River for thousands of years while enjoying their meal.

Standing in the steamy kitchen, I watched with fascination as several chefs stood around a big pot filled with boiling water. Holding a lump of dough in one hand, they swiftly sliced it into thin pieces, which flew into the boiling water. Another one took a chopstick to mould the jelly-like dough into small fish. Yet another kneaded and pulled the dough into thin and long noodles.... If not seeing them at work with my own eyes, I could never imagine there were so many ways to manipulate the dough into so many forms –

2

1. Enjoying a banquet at the restaurant
2. A variety of well-known Shanxi dishes
3. Slicing noodles from the dough demands great skill.

3

some are thin and long, some thick and wide and still some look like willow leaves ....

I have known for a long time that people in Shanxi can produce numerous delicacies with flour, yet, I was not really convinced until I saw the chefs at work in the Taiyuan Wheaten Food Restaurant. I did not have to wait too long, before the various dishes of wheaten food were brought before me and I could taste for myself the delicious noodles I had seen being prepared in the kitchens. Served in different gravies, I followed the Shanxi people's example of adding some vinegar and chilly oil to the bowls and tried them one by one. Some people might argue that it is easy to make them. I can assure them it is not. Take the sliced noodles for example. It calls for skill and experience. Holding the dough in one hand and a knife in the other, an experienced cook slices through the dough swiftly and continuously, with the second slice following the crest line left by the first slice. Moreover, all the slices must be roughly the same size and form – thicker in the middle and smooth on both edges, with pointed tips at both ends. An experienced chef can make 200 slices in one minute.

Boyu'r, another type of noodle also called knife-plucked noodles, is made by rolling the dough into one long piece and then folding it into six layers. The flattened dough is then put on a cutting board and a chef uses a specially made knife, with a handle on each end to cut the dough into noodles and plunge them into the boiling water at the same time. As for the making of mao'erduo (cat's ear), the first step is to roll the dough into long strips and then pull off small pieces as big as the thumb nail and then use the thumb to knead it into the shape of a cat's ear. Everything is done at lightning speed. When finished, they are place in a pot of boiling water. The cooked mao'erduo appears transparent with somewhat turned up sides

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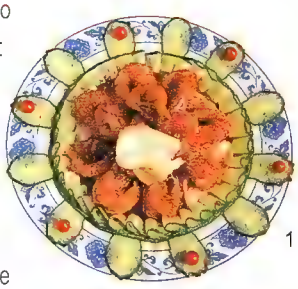
1. An effigy of Mr. Song Peiyu, the owner of the Taiyun Wheaten Food Restaurant, helps draw customers.
2. Sweet steak noodles
3. Dutch bean and mushroom noodles
4. Flower basket guest-greeting noodles
5. Pieces of dough are kneaded into the shape of a cat's ear. (by Chan Yat Nin)

5

to leave a round pit in the middle.

Since remote times there has been a saying in China : "Rice in the south and wheaten food in the north." People in Shanxi have a long history of eating wheaten food, and the immense variety of such food in Shanxi might, in part, be related to the province's position as a birthplace of China's ancient culture. Just having a look at the numerous magnificent ancient buildings in Shanxi, which account for some 70 percent of the total throughout the country, one would definitely understand why Shanxi boasts such a rich cuisine culture and why the Shanxi wheaten food enjoys so great a reputation. Mr. Song Peiyu, owner of the famous Taiyuan Wheaten Food Restaurant, has a special interest in poetry, calligraphy and painting and owns a large collection of works by famous men of letters. He is also fond of Peking Opera and calls himself a "Peking Opera fan".

Mr.Song, who is well-educated, has also taken the time to reseach and study ancient recipes so that he can learn from the old masters. He has also developed a "Shanxi wheaten food banquet" which he designed in order to appeal to the tastes of people today. For several years it has been a favourite amongst Shanxi people wanting to entertain visitors and foreign guests.



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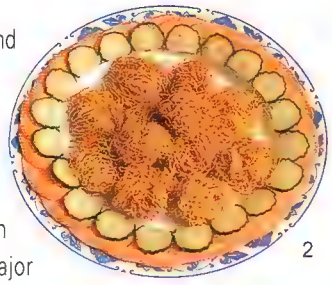

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The gravy seasoning and sauce used for the banquet are divided into 24 types with 18 different tastes, which is vividly called "Eighteen Arhats". In addition, there are 13 major courses, which are called the "Thirteen Young Generals", made with either wheat flour, bean flour, or raw oat flour, as well as a soup with a unique flavour and famous Shanxi wines such as Fenjiu and

1. Lobster noodles with dumplings
2. Crispy buns filled with red bean paste
3. Su San-carp noodles
4. Noodles are plunged into boiling water immediately after they are cut.

4

PRICE LIST

Typical Local Wheaten Food:

Song Peiyu longevity noodles (including gravy, beef, steak, chicken and pork noodles): 6 yuan per bowl Celestial noodles: 16 yuan per bowl. Raw oats pastry: 3 yuan per steamer. Zisun raw oats bread: 9 yuan per steamer.

Banquet (Per Table/Yuan)	
High Grade	1,200-1,600
Medium Grade	800-1,200
Common	450-800
Typical Local Food	350-450

A la carte (Per Dish/Yuan)	
Flower basket guest-greeting noodles	76
Lobster noodles with dumplings	136
Dutch bean & mushroom noodles	39
Steak noodles	36
Squash, waternut & vegetable noodles	46
Su San carp noodles	53
Long Men fish roll noodles	68
Longxu noodles	46
Chicken noodles	88

Sorghum White Spirit ....

Article and Photos by Shan Xiaogang
Translated by Li Zhenguo

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1. Another way of preparing the noodles
2. A few of the seasonings for the wheaten food

The Brilliant Art of Bronze Mirror

The Han regular mirror

The bronze mirror has a history of several thousand years in China. It was invented to meet people's aesthetic as well as functional needs. Although it is seen today as a valuable piece of ancient bronzeware, it once played an important role in daily life.

In ancient times people called mirror *jian* or *zhaozi*. Emperor Li Shimin of the Tang Dynasty saw a more profound use for the bronze mirror, believing one should: "Use bronze as a mirror so as to straighten one's clothes and caps; use history as a mirror so as to know the rise and fall of past dynasties; use others as a mirror so as to acknowledge one's own mistakes." In saying this Li Shimin not only made clear the role of the mirror but from a philosophical point of view told people how to behave. The appearance of the bronze mirror was a great convenience to people, it gave them much pleasure and it was always in great demand, and so the art developed very quickly.

Most bronze mirrors are circular in shape, but there are also some which are square, polygonal or free-formed. The level of technique required to make a bronze mirror was very high. The metal used was alloy bronze. It was polished until it produced an absolutely smooth mirror-like surface. In fact, many of the ancient bronze mirrors which have been unearthed have remained shiny, bright and speck-less even to this day, showing the high metallurgical technique employed.

On the reverse side of these bronze mirrors are elaborate designs which have been engraved, cast, painted, gold-plated, gilded, or inlaid with gold or silver. The patterns and images encom-

Navigation mirror of the Song Dynasty

Prince Qin's mirror of the Tang Dynasty

pass a variety of designs ranging from geometrical patterns, animals, flowers, plants, fairy tales, anecdotes and auspicious words. In the centre of the mirror, at the back, is a knob pierced with a hole, through which a ribbon was threaded. This was done so that the mirror could be held in the hand or hung on the wall. The art of the bronze mirror is a true reflection of the aspects of the society at that time and an insight into the profound thoughts and psychology of the people. The following is a brief introduction to the different designs used to decorate bronze mirrors:

Geometric Patterns:

This kind of decoration, exquisite and beautiful, is a meticulous form of art. The skill of the craftsman is shown in the proper and strict arrangement of the patterns. They include mountains, torches, rhombus, words and clouds.

Flowers and Plants:

In sharp contrast to the geometric patterns, these flower and plant designs are bold, lively and full of vitality. These patterns include small flowers and grasses, creepers, vines, grapes, etc.

Fairy Tales:

Romantic, idealistic and full of imagery, these were based on traditional dramas showing the ideals of the common people and their hope for a brighter future. Particularly worthy of mention is a

Confucian mirror of the Song Dynasty

A Ming-dynasty mirror with the design of double-fish

moon mirror belonging to the Tang Dynasty (618-907). The back of the mirror contains a symmetrical picture with a silk tree at its centre. The tree is a mass of branches and leaves, two trunks are entwined and it's foliage is heavily laden with fruit. The tree symbolises enduring love. Beside the tree are two lovers riding auspicious clouds, who hold in their hands some keepsakes. While riding the clouds they express their determination to love each other for the rest of their lives. A few rocks arranged at the roots of the tree suggest that the sea may run dry and the rocks may crumble, but their love for each other will remain the same. The picture fully demonstrates the rich imagination of the artists of the Tang Dynasty.

Anecdotes of Real Life:

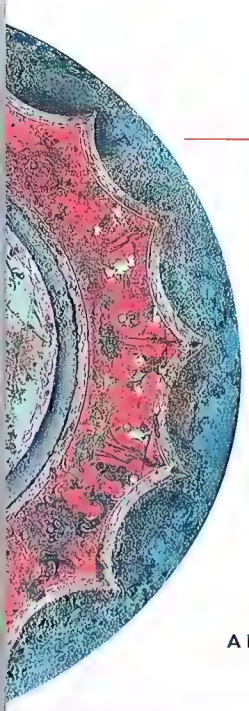
By drawing inspiration from reality these designs sing in praise of life. Realistic and convincing, most of them depict scenes of banquets, dance, navigation and polo. The Navigation Mirror of the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) is a fine example. A large vessel sails full speed across a stormy sea; the border of the mirror is painted with petal patterns. The composition of the design is both harmonious and lively.

Animals:

Through representations of an animals' docility and bravery, the designs in this group are used to express ancient people's desire to balance the ecological relationship between man and animal. Animal patterns often used are deer, camels, sea horses, sheep and wild beasts. The Bronze Mirror of the Yan Family of the Han Dynasty (206 B.C.-A.D. 24), for example has two sheep walking side by side – implying "all sharing the same auspices". The design was sketched using a single line. The primitive drawing and simple design give the picture a very bold and natural look. The sheep are etched to represent their strong character. This mirror fully reflects the creativity and imagination of the people of the Han Dynasty.

Auspicious Words:

Another distinguishing feature of the bronze mirror is the use of auspicious words to decorate the backs. Written mostly in seal character, the number of words vary from two to over 70. The commonly used phrases are, for example: "Enjoy great wealth and rank, drink and eat properly, be happy all the time"; "Crops are ripe in the sound of the wind"; "Be sure to let your parents always enjoy high prestige and command universal respect", etc. These words express people's



A Han-dynasty painted bronze mirror

Twelve-animal mirror of the Sui Dynasty

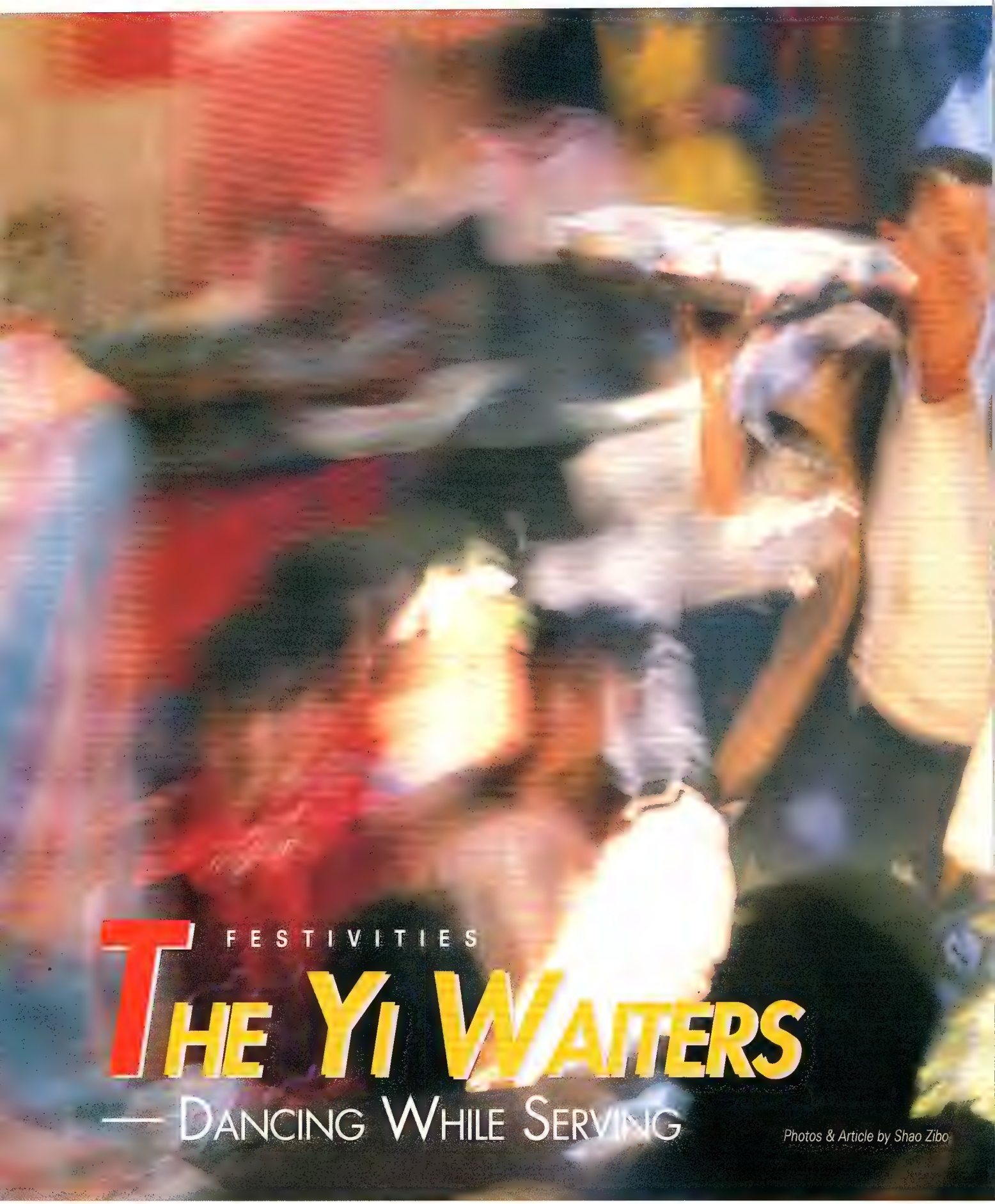
Yan Family mirror of the Han Dynasty with two sheep walking side by side

wish to live and work in peace and happiness.

Bronze mirror is a treasure full of both practical and artistic value. Compared with the other bronzes made since the Shang and Zhou dynasties, bronze mirror gives light and joyful expression while other bronzes look stately and restrained. Rich in content and lively in style, the bronze mirror is filled with people's imagination and lofty ideals. It is an art of simplicity, elegance and dignity.

Photos & Text by Yang Limin
Translated by Xiong Zhenru

Moon mirror of the Tang Dynasty depicting the romance of two lovers



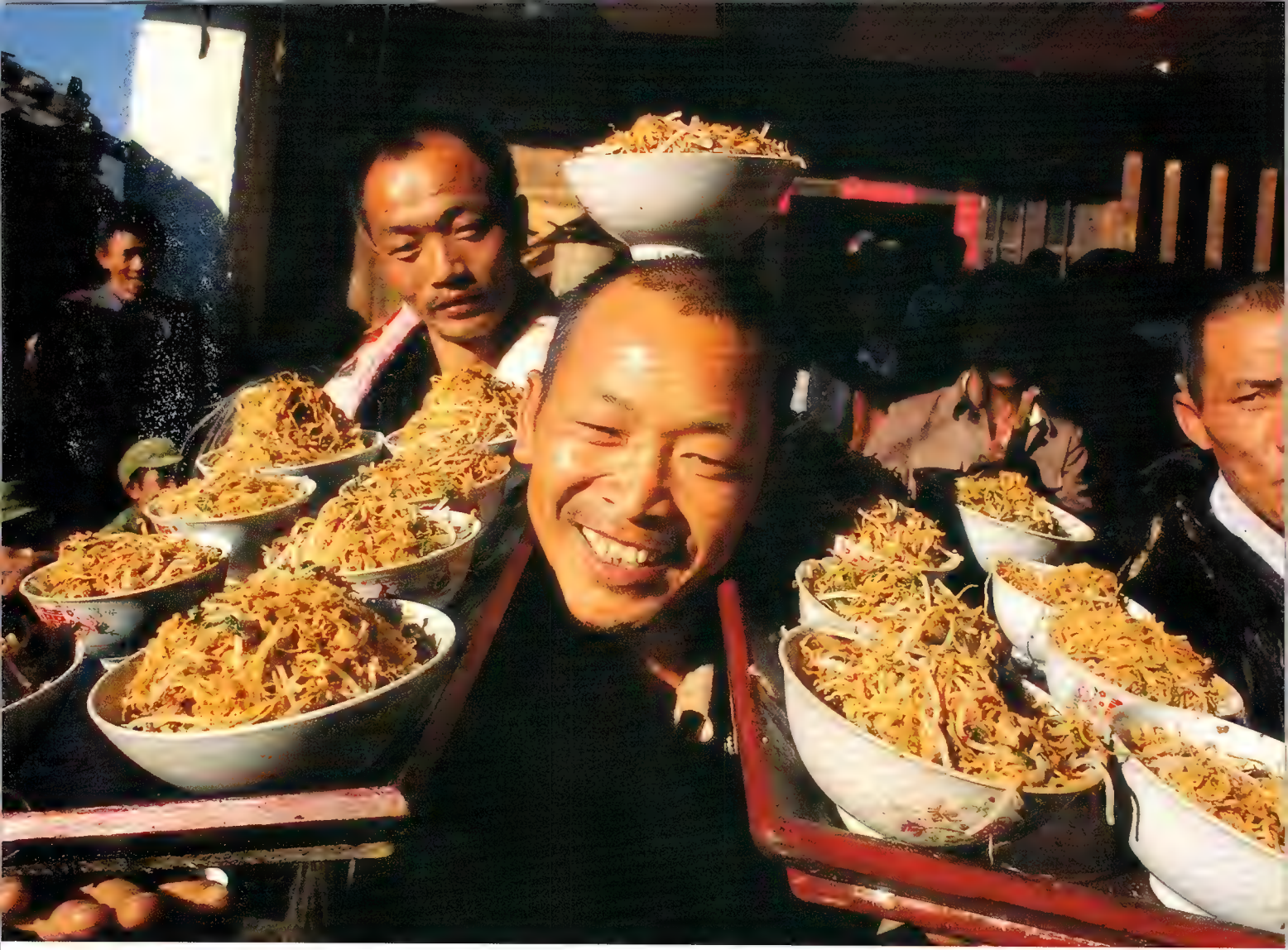
FESTIVITIES

THE YI WAITERS

— DANCING WHILE SERVING

Photos & Article by Shao Zibo

The waiter's dance is a unique part of the wedding.



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When I was in Dali, Yunnan Province, I was told that dancing, is ubiquitous to the Yi culture. A symbol to express the festival mood, dancing is seen wherever there is a cause for celebration – a wedding, a funeral, or a festival. There are all kinds of dances too – the waiter's dance, the foot dance, the wine dance, the New Year's dance, the singing dance, the moon dance, the ash basin dance, etc.... And once a dance begins, it goes on and on forever – usually from dusk to dawn.

I have already seen the New Year's dance performed as part of the Yis' New Year celebrations. But how can a waiter dance while serving? Just as I was wondering, news came to me that Li Guihua, a well-versed waiter-dancer from Abi Village of Wuliang Mountain was hosting a wedding party for his son and was going to demonstrate the waiter's dance. It was an opportunity not to be missed, so I immediately set out for the village.

Endless Stream of Diners

Getting to the remote village tucked high in the mountains required strenuous effort on my part, but I eventually made it. The village was exceptionally quiet. There appeared to be no sign of anybody getting married. It was only once I was well inside the village that I began to run into people busy preparing for the wedding reception: there were horses laden with firewood, young men carrying tables and chairs, women washing vegetables by the well and middle-aged men building temporary fireplaces against a courtyard wall. Inside the courtyard some were preparing to take the wedding presents to the home of the bride; some young men were building a tent which would serve as a makeshift dining room and, in the sitting room, a gentleman was writing on pieces of red paper. In fact, almost everybody in the village was busy with some kind of preparation for the wedding.

Early the next morning, the courtyard floor of the cloth tent was covered with a thick carpet of pine needles. Two rows of dining tables filled the main tent, each row containing ten tables and each table being seated with six people. I asked the host how many guests he had invited and was told that it was hard to give an exact figure. As the mountains were high and the road rough, some people might come, others might not, and some would arrive late. For a wedding like this, there can be as many as several hundred, or even a thousand guests. Obviously there were not going to be enough seats so they would have to wait in line for the wedding feast. Each time the gong sounded, a

new group of diners were invited to seat down and eat. Clearly, there needed to be plenty of cooks and waiters. Normally, the feast begins at 12:00 noon and ends around 8:00 or 9:00 in the evening. What follows next is a foot dance and singing in antiphonal style, which will go on until the early hours of the next morning.

While we were talking, a bugle and a high-pitch suona sounded. The entourage to "fetch the bride" set out. They moved along the mountain path to the accompaniment of lively jovial music, which echoed through the mountains.

As they arrived at the bride's home, a feast was in mid swing. The walls of the sitting room were lined with her dowry, ranging from cooking pots, a kettle, basins, buckets, leather suitcases, thermos flasks, a sewing machine and a tape recorder. There were also a three-door wardrobe, a desk and a dressing table which were to be moved by the two dozen young men sent by the bridegroom.

Once the bride and bridegroom arrived at their new home, a gong sounded to announce the beginning of the feast and the first group of guests was ushered into the tent. Then, the waiters began to appear. They first bowed to tablets representing the spirit of their ancestors and next turned around to bow to the musicians before returning into the kitchen.

The band started to play some lively rhythmic music and the waiters came out dancing, each holding a pair of trays. They performed a number of amusing poses and dance steps as they moved to the

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1. Not everyone can learn to do this: balancing dishes in both hands and on the head.
2. The entourage "to fetch the bride" returns carrying the bride's dowry.
3. Holding 10 bowls on each arm is a piece of cake for a master waiter-dancer.

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centre of the courtyard. Everybody moved forward to watch their performance, even those outside waiting to eat.

Strength and Stamina

I was told by an old man of more than 70 years of age: "You are very lucky because the dancing waiters performing today are all experienced performers from Nanjian. Some are third and fourth generation dancers in the family. To do the waiter's dance, you not only need technique, but exceptional strength and stamina. The tray loaded with dishes is very heavy." The choreography for the waiter's dance is exact, in addition there is an established order for serving the dishes. One careless act brings humiliation to the perpetrator. After each dance act two bowls were served from the tray while the dancers pause. This was repeated until all the dishes were served.

The dishes were laid out on the table one after another and once the music stopped, people began to eat. After a while the gong was struck for the next round of diners, the table was cleared and dishes were once again served by the dancing waiters.

Not a single drop of liquor was served at the wedding feast so no one was drunk. The only imbibers were the musicians – perhaps they needed a stimulant to keep themselves going for the long hours of playing.

The position of each of the dishes on the table must be exact, if a diner moves one of the dishes away from its original position, a waiter

1. The choreography of dancing and serving is not easy.
2. Village elders waiting to see the bride.
3. Enjoying the waiter's dance while eating.
4. The sound of the suona forms a major part of the waiter's dance performance.
5. Guests waiting their turn to eat watch the waiter's dance

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quickly puts it back. Diners can also tell how many courses will be served just by looking at the layout of the table. At a four-course dinner, the dishes are laid in a square. At a five-course dinner the dishes are first laid out in a square position and the fifth is placed in the middle. At a six-course feast, the dishes are laid out in two rows of three.

Just then a waiter entered holding a stack of bowls in each hand. He started to dance rhythmically and was ushered into the centre of the courtyard by two fellow waiters. The blowing of the suona became more lively and rhythmic and his dance steps more breathtaking. Behind him was a man draped in a sheep's skin, each of his arms supported a tray of dishes while another tray was placed on his head. He winked, twitched his nose, made clicking sounds with his mouth and performed a number of amusing motions along with the other waiters. As he moved into the centre of the courtyard, he turned around twice and his fellow waiters screamed and made funny faces. Two more people came forward and quickly helped to serve the dishes from the trays. The dancing waiter then put the handles of two copper ladles in his mouth, someone placed a bowl of food into each ladle. With both elbows bent and raised to shoulder level yet more bowls of food were placed on each of his shoulders, elbows and hands. I could not help admire the strength he had in order to hold the ladles in his mouth.

I cannot remember how many times the gong sounded, or how many dishes were served, or just how many guests attended the feast, my only impression is that there were many. As the sun finally began to set, villagers were still enjoying themselves at the table.

Translated by F. Huang

Travellers' Tips

Transport: The waiter's dance can be seen in the villages of Eryuan and Nanjian counties in Dali Prefecture, Yunnan Province. There are bus services between Kunming, the province's capital, and Dali from where one can visit the neighbouring cities and counties by bus.

Accommodation: Rates at the hotels and guest houses in Eryuan and Nanjian are reasonable. Rice is the staple food and the dishes are not very different from those served in Guangdong or Hong Kong, except that the local people love spicy rice-flour noodles.

Notes: In Dali, the waiter's dance can be seen during the third day of the Third Month Festival. To take part in this festival, one has to arrive in Dali before the day (usually in early to mid-April). Accommodation and food in Dali are very convenient and the hotels are complete with tourist facilities. Several restaurants in the urban district serve fairly good Western food.

ACTION

Walking Through the Taihang Mountains

Article & Photos by Shan Xiaogang

Winding its way southward from the Sanggan River in Hebei to the northern bank of the Yellow River in Shanxi and Henan, the Taihang Mountains form one of the largest mountain ranges of Northern China. Sloping gently on the west side, but extremely precipitous on the east, it serves as a natural barrier between the North China Plain and the Shanxi Plateau. Seen from the east, it rises skywards like a giant. No wonder the ancients called it the "Spine of Heaven."

My travel along this "spine" began at Licheng County in south-east Shanxi. We left the dark and rather gloomy valley gorge at 3 a.m., with the hope of glimpsing the magnificent sunrise on Banshan Mountain.

Dawn was breaking as we walked across to a flat rocky platform jutting out into the air. With no shelter above nor below, it was difficult to stand firm in the fierce wind and there was the danger of being swept over the edge into the deep valley below at any moment. The wind was surprisingly cold. Some of my fellow travellers backed up to a rock wall and huddled up under a cotton quilt they had brought along. I decided I would not miss that moment when the sun pops up from the horizon for anything. I bucked up my spirits and stood glued to the spot. Unfortunately, the wind was so strong that it swept up flurries of yellow earth, forming a sandy veil and it was a long time before we could see the sun. By then, it had lost much of its original appeal. However, when I looked downward over the multitude of mountain peaks bathed in the morning glow and surrounded in mist, they appeared magnificent, while some of the perpendicular cliffs turned golden.

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Our next stop was Pingshun County, a mountain town totally enclosed by tall peaks. From there we turned east and headed for the hills, toward Hongti Pass and Sulanyan.

Shortly after entering the mountains, our car began to follow a winding road up the mountain and we soon found ourselves completely enveloped in a thick fog and visibility was restricted to three metres. We drove like this for about an hour before we left the fog behind. We turned and continued eastward along a country road, meandering among the peaks. The dirt road, though rather narrow, was thankfully quite smooth and not bumpy at all. Then the road ended. So we left the car and walked downhill, picking up speed along the trail of the ancient mail road at the bottom of the valley.

An hour or so later, after passing a hillock, our eyes suddenly came upon a spectacular sight: two mountain peaks facing each other were lit up by sunlight which pierced through the clouds and through the pass between them, we could see a distant valley enveloped in shimmering lights. We were overwhelmed by the grandeur of the scene. Hongti Pass is located on the northern side of the valley, within a jar-shaped col, surrounded by sheer cliffs. Inside the col, the ground was covered by a variety of rare flora which transformed it into a vast flower pot. Once referred to as the "gateway to Shanxi and Henan", Hongti Pass used to provide the only commercial passageway within a radius of fifty kilometres. At the east end was a steep "stairway", where the stone steps leading

1. Villagers praying for rain at the Yuhuang (Jade Emperor) Temple
2. The plank road dug out from the cliff face in Huixian County

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1. A distant view of the Taihang Mountains (by Wang Shuzhou)
2. Beyond these steep cliffs, mountain dwellers are found. (by Wang Shuzhou)
3. An ancient plank road built between rocks
4. A Taihang family at Mt. Wangwu

down three and a half kilometres to the foot of the mountain.

We returned to the car and drove back along the same route for a view of the cliff highway along the middle of the cliff which some call the "birds' path". The residents of Sulanyan Township had spent ten years carving out this tunnel-highway threading its way up into the clouds.

The Road for Cats

We continued our journey along the Hongni (Rainbow) River. As it passed the southern end of Hongni (Rainbow) Village, it abruptly tumbled over a cliff into a rocky trough several hundred metres deep. This is the Hongni Waterfall. The walls of the trough, like the Purple Peak Mountain at the village's northern end, are purple-red in colour, on account of their rich silicon iron content. The village was sprawled out along the bank of the trough against a mountain slope. We were interested to find that the huge rocks sticking out from the river bed were covered with clothes; the villagers had conveniently turned them into a drying area. I carefully picked my way up to the head of the waterfall and looking below I estimated that during the rainy season the waterfall could be as wide as 200 metres.

As we approached Huguan County, the peaks rose higher while the temperature dropped lower still. Braving the howling wind, we headed for the county's highest spot – Ewu (House of Swan) Township on Laoyinshan Mountain. It used to take two days to travel the several dozen kilometres from Ewu to the county seat, first walking, then riding on horseback and finally by bus. Although it is now accessible by car, it is still rarely visited by outsiders.

It was past midnight when we arrived at Ewu. The next morning, our plan was to catch the sunrise but since we could hardly make out the terrain in the pitch dark, we failed. Noticing the disappointment on my face, Mr. Guo, the township head, took me to see the Cats' Road which would take us to Qiaoshang Township at the foot of the mountain. Extremely narrow and steep, it is described as a path fit only for leopards. At the head of this path was a dilapidated stone hut, inside which we found a cable which dropped right down to the bottom of the precipice. We were told this used to serve as the pulley for transporting mail. Villagers would tie a rock onto the bag containing the mail and hook it onto the cable. Once the cable is released, the bag would shoot out of sight like an arrow.

The valley in which Qiaoshang Township is located is the site of the historically famous Yangchangban, a place visited, during the Three King-

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doms period, by the famous general Cao Cao of Wei during his march to Shangdang to wipe out any remnants of his opponent, Yuan Shao.

Reflections in the Lake

We came to the birthplace of Chinese chess – Chess Hill, in Lingchuan County. The hill is actually just a branch of the Taihang Mountain Range, the slopes being milder. At the top, we found many small pebbles, as smooth as the chess pieces we know today. They had been formed by coagulated magma and the ancients actually used them as chess pieces.

Notwithstanding the failures of our two previous attempts to watch the sunrise, we were determined to try again. For that, we stayed overnight at Gujiao Township. We were off before daybreak, heading straight for Wang Mang Ridge, the very place where the usurper Wang Mang of Western Han Dynasty (206 B.C.-A.D.24) had built his fortress two thousand years ago. As we stood in the darkness at the edge of the cliff, we suddenly realised that there below us, at the foot of the hill were numerous lights shining like so many stars in the sky – it turned out to be the urban area of Huixian county seat in Henan Province.

As the morning sun emerged over the horizon, the peaks and valleys revealed their magnificence. The strange-looking peaks and rocks appeared like ghosts in the misty morning glow. To the east, two mountain peaks formed a gateway through which one could reach Henan Province. This was once a strategic passage between Lingchuan and Huixian.

As we descended the mountain, passing several peaks and valleys, the temperature rose. When we arrived at Magedang, we found the scenery totally different. Instead of withered grass and leaves, the trees flourished with crimson leaves and dried-up riverbeds gurgled with water. By the time the river reached Wujiawan Village, it had formed a lake, its deep blue water mirroring the rocky peaks, the flaming forests, the golden reeds and crimson persimmons.

We hurried on toward Huangwei Mountain. Unfortunately, the cold wave that swept the area two days ago had left the mountain bare of its red leaves. The steep road to the top was closed. All the fallen leaves on the ground made it difficult to climb and we had to use our hands to clutch the bushes overhead in order not to slip. Next, we had to negotiate an almost perpendicular flight of roughly pieced-together stone steps before we reached the main peak, Zushuaiding, which stood above all the rest like a single bamboo shoot. The temple here still retained some of its coiled dragon pillars, stone lions and wood carvings on the eaves, which date back to the Song Dynasty (960-1279). We were impressed by their simplicity of style and vividness of expression.

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Before long, the setting sun cast its orange glow on the rooftop, turning it into a dazzling gold, as all around, the scene darkened and blurred.

1. A natural stairway
2. Watching the sunrise at Mt. Banshan Peak
3. Waterfalls at Hongni (Rainbow) Village

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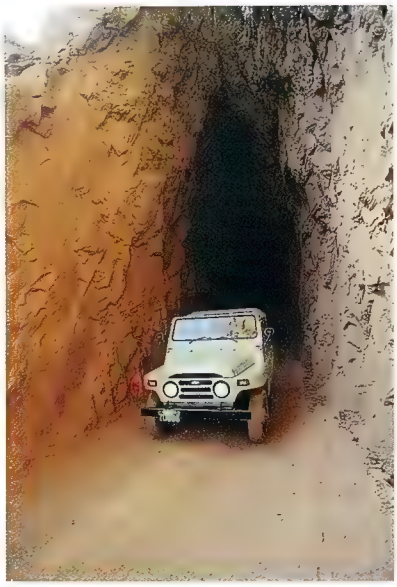

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To the east, the purplish sunset had left a faint red hue on the rocky mountain peak; while to the west, the many peaks were now no more than dark shadows. We hurried downhill in the twilight.

Confucius Forced to Turn Back

To save time, our guide suggested we take a short cut. And what a hazardous one it was! It is a path cut into the rocky cliff once traversed by herb collectors. It was no more than two feet wide. On one side was a cliff, on the other was a chasm so deep that when we threw a rock down, it was quite a while before we heard the sound of it hitting the ground. At the start, everyone had forged ahead in high spirits, but as we got to the dangerous part, everyone regretted having accepted the guide's proposal. But there was no turning back. The only thing we could do was to lean against the cliff wall and slowly shift our feet sideways. The section known as Wusongyan was especially difficult as the path was even narrower than one foot and was wet and slippery on account of the water seeping through the rocks. Tension took hold. One dared hardly breathe, let alone utter a single word.

Jincheng was the last stop on our Taihang trip in Shanxi Province. Tianjing Pass, the highest of the peaks, used to be a strategic vantage point on the route from Shanxi to the ancient capitals, Luoyang and Kaifeng, situated in Henan Province. It is said that even Confucius had to turn back, awed by its sheer height and perilous topography.

We entered Henan Province. In Jiyuan City at the southern end of the Taihang Mountain Range, there is a famous mountain named Wangwu. Known as one of the nine famous Daoist mountains in China, its main peak, Tiantan, rises 1,715 metres above sea level, taller than any other peak in northern Henan. Wangwu has been made doubly well-known because of the legend about the Foolish Old Man Who Removed the Mountain. The "foolish old man" is said to have lived in a village in the southern foothill of Wangwu Mountain. The broken cliffs and knocked off ridges are there as a result of the work he had carried out year after year to remove the hill that blocked the entrance to his house, until one day the gods were so moved by his tenacity they moved the hill away. In the village, there is a well from which the "foolish old man" is said to have drawn his water.

From here we spent the following four hours to reach Tiantan Peak, known locally as the "Master Peak". Master Peak is a rocky platform with perpendicular cliffs on all four sides. Of the old buildings, only a gateway dating back to the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) and a dozen or so steles from the Ming and Qing dynasties remain. One hall is currently under renovation. From these ruins, one can still imagine the splendour of those olden days.

Bathed in the twilight, groups of mountain folk climbed towards the peak, holding huge banners and beating gongs and drums. Above their heads, they carried a red cloth banner, several dozen feet long. It was full of signatures from the people in the surrounding villages. These men were acting as their representatives and would burn incense and recite scriptures on their behalf to thank the gods in Heaven for responding to their prayers and giving them rain and a good harvest.

Translated by Zhang Qingnian

1. Walking the bride to her new home on the other side of the mountain
2. A tunnel on the highway near Pingshunti

Tips for touring Mt. Taihang:

Route: In order to tour Taihang Mountains from the south-eastern Shanxi to north-western Henan, begin your journey at Beijing or Zhengzhou. Take the direct train to Changzhi in Shanxi Province, then change to bus to alight at Licheng. As you travel south, you pass Pingshun, Huguan Pass, Lingchuan, Jincheng, the canyon at southern Mt. Taihang to finally reach Mt. Wangwu at the southern tip of the Taihang Mountains in Henan Province.

Roads: Highways connect all the counties, townships and villages at Taihang Mountains, so it is convenient to hire a car and find scenic spots with the help of local tourist guides. If you love mountaineering, bring along your kit and camp out. If you prefer to travel on foot, hire a tourist guide because it is very easy to lose one's way in the mountains.

For further information, contact the tourism bureaux and tourist agencies at the cities or counties of Changzhi, Licheng, Jincheng, Jiyuan, Luoyang, Xiuwu, Huixian or Linzhou.

Accommodation: There are state-run guest houses and hostels in the cities and counties and it is possible to stay with local families in the townships and villages by an arrangement with the travel agencies or local authorities. Taihang Mountains abounds in natural resources, therefore a visit at the right time of a year guarantees a good seasonal dish of exotic game.

Climate and Travel Seasons

Taihang Mountains is situated in a temperate zone of continental monsoon climate. It has long, harsh winters; short, windy springs; hot, wet summers; and cool, dry autumns.

Autumn: the best time of year when you can feast your eyes on colourful scenery and your mouth with the plentiful exotic fruits.

Summer: The rainy climate creates kaleidoscopic views of cloud and fog which partially enshroud the mountain and falls.

Spring: Blossoming flowers and trees create a riot of colours and sweet fragrance.

Winter: Strangely shaped rocks and cliffs reveal themselves in stark contrast to the white snow.

A trip into the mountain is enjoyable at any time of the year. The temperature at the foot of the mountain varies greatly to that on the peak as the height ranges from 1000 to 2000 metres. The mountain itself abounds in steep cliffs and rocks and is therefore challenging to both the traveller and mountaineer. Bravery, perseverance and a love of nature will be your best companions throughout the journey.

Activities

1. An International Gliding Competition is held annually in September at Mt. Linlü in Linzhou City. Competitors should register with the tourism bureau in Linzhou.
2. Rock climbing enthusiasts have ample opportunity to test their skills at the eastern part of Taihang Mountains where there are plenty of steep rocks and cliffs.
3. Touring the mountains on foot, you will marvel at the greatness of nature:

• On your way to the peaks, you will encounter many strangely-shaped rocks and grottoes, and witness magnificent sunrises and sunsets with the sunlight revealing the colourful profile of the mountain.

• Falls and springs are plentiful in the mountains. As most of the areas remain undeveloped, the water is clean and safe. You can also enjoy the beautiful scenery created by the Zhanghe River and numerous streams running through the Taihang Mountains.

• Walk along the narrow plank roads cut into the cliff face for a thrilling experience.

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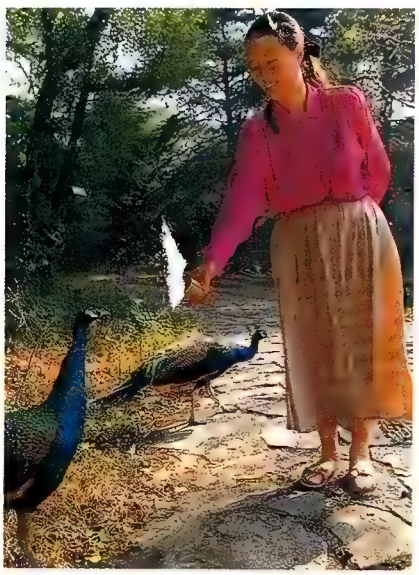
• Visiting the mountain dwellers affords you an insight into their unique life-style.

For lovers of history and antiques, visits to the pagodas and temples built during Tang, Song, Yuan and Five Dynasties at Pingshun, Lingchuan, Jincheng are enriching experiences as many treasures and painted sculptures are housed there.

1. Children of the Rainbow Village crossing the Rainbow River

THE PEACOCK LADY

Imagine wandering through a beautiful garden of peacocks, where some of the birds gracefully strut across green lawns in a leisurely, carefree manner while others sit under



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the shade of palm trees preening themselves, as if they were the masters. Such a place exists in the southern suburbs of the ancient city of Nanjing. The gardens are managed by a local woman called Yang Guoqing who grew up during the Cultural Revolution. Fearing she might run into trouble in the turbulent society, her parents locked her in a small room within the house. With only a little cat to keep her company, she was asked to copy quotations from Mao Zedong and it was during this time that she developed a profound fondness for small animals.

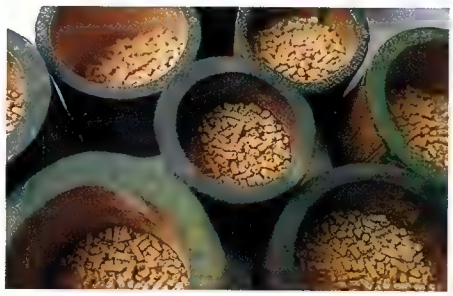
Many years later, in 1991, Yang Guoqing went to visit a friend in Yangzhou and saw a peacock that her friend had hatched by using a dove. When she went to visit the little peacock again she was disappointed to find that it had been sold. Suddenly, scenes of the lively little squirrels on the lawn beside Le Louvre and the pigeons around the L'arc de Triomphe in Paris, where she had studied, flooded back to her mind. She got the idea to set up a privately-owned peacock garden, where people could experience the feelings of harmony and warmth that come from relationships between human beings and animals.

As the site for her garden Yang chose the 40 *mu* of land on the eastern range of Rainflower Platform famous for its agate-coloured pebbles. Having signed a 10-year contract for the land, she began to organise a group of people to help her recreate the beautiful scenery typical of Yunnan thousands of miles away. Then she went to Yunnan to bring back more than 50 peacocks.

The blue peacocks were allowed to roam freely within the garden and, in their natural environment, they thrived. Today, with the second and third generations of off-spring, the number of peacocks has doubled. While the birds enjoy their freedom in their kingdom, so do the visitors – there are no railings nor warnings.

Yang Guoqing's work, supported by her family, has won recognition from the 100,000 people who come to visit her garden every year. Her garden is particularly loved by the young children.

Yang Quoqing hopes that visitors will come to appreciate the special bond which can be formed between humans and animals. At the age of 37 Yang remains single. As many Chinese parents would, Yang's father and mother nag her constantly to find a man to keep her company. When asked about her plans for the future, the young lady smiled and answered in a gentle voice: "If possible, I'll have this flock of peacocks to keep me company for the rest of my life. But, after all, they are not all of my life."



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3

Text by Zhou Xiaoping
Photos by Xie Guanghui
Translated by Xiong Zhenru

1. Yang Guoqing feeding the peacocks
2. Feed for the peacocks
3. A peacock showing off its beautiful tail feathers

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Tourists Flock to China

The number of visitors attracted through the "Visit China '97" programme is expected to reach 48 million (up 4 percent over last year), thereby maintaining China's status as the world's fifth most popular tourist destination.

The programme, under the theme "Rediscover China – Land of Sensation", features the country's landscape, heritage, folklore, holiday resorts and special tour routes. A variety of well-known tourist sites, special tour routes and tourist festivals are being highlighted to cater to overseas and domestic travellers.

Xinjiang to Develop Solar Energy

Northwest China's Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region plans to speed up development of its solar and wind energy resources. Xinjiang boasts rich solar energy and wind resources. The average annual sunshine in Xinjiang stands at 2,500 to 3,500 hours and the region has nine windy zones covering 155,000 square kilometres, where wind-power can generate a capacity of 152 million kilowatts.

To hasten development, the region will build a solar energy collector base to produce solar energy batteries and develop application systems and solar-powered electricity generating stations. The region also plans to establish a group of wind-powered stations with a total wind-generating capacity reaching 135,000 kilowatts by the end of 2000, and 601,700 kilowatts by 2010.

Xinjiang has already established more than 2,500 solar energy cooking stoves and more then 3,700 mini-wind powered generating machines in rural areas. It is believed that this new energy resource will have important bearing on the local economy and the environment.

Nature Museum, Jilin

The building of a new museum in Changchun, the capital of Jilin Province, is now well underway. Costing US$2.4 million the museum will have 11 exhibition halls covering 10,000 square metres and be divided into two parts – nature and cultural relics. The exhibits will inform visitors on topography, animal specimens, planets and celestial bodies, the Earth's evolution, natural disasters and their prevention, nature conservation and cultural relics. The museum is due for completion by the end of this year.

Telephone Ticketing for Beijing's Railway

The Beijing Railway Station has opened a telephone ticket-ordering service for passengers leaving Beijing. Passengers can order tickets four days prior to their departure date and can pick up tickets at five designated sub-offices in the city the following day. To use the service: dial 65634672 and give your name, identification number and ticket requirements.

Tourism Joint Venture, Shenzhen

Three travel agencies, with headquarters in Shenzhen, Japan and Hong Kong, have signed a joint venture to set up the Huaming International Tourism Company Ltd. The new company will be located in Shenzhen Special Economic Zone in Guangdong Province, and will be the country's first Sino-foreign tourism joint venture.

Beijing Opera Files Available on Internet

The 200-year-old Peking Opera is now available to the 40,000 Internet users in China. Thanks to help from the Beijing Calmar Network Engineering Co, the opera's Internet debut enables computer users to study the traditional art form. Taking advantage of modern technology, this international treasure of China – as famous as the Great Wall and the Summer Palace – will enable more people to understand this ancient art form based on unique lyrics, recitation techniques and costumes. Yet, unfortunately, technical problems and copyright laws make it difficult to show any films of Peking Opera on the Internet.

Minority Movies, Chengdu

Film markets in ethnic areas in Southwest China's Sichuan Province have been brought into sharp focus thanks to the efforts of the Sichuan Film Co. To help translate Chinese movies into ethnic minority languages, the company has donated a set of recording equipment worth US$12,048 to the Liangshan Prefecture of the Yi Ethnic Group.

Coast Road Under Way, Xiamen

Construction has begun on the second phase of a ring road surrounding the scenic island city of Xiamen in Southeast China's Fujian Province. The coast road, which is 50 kilometres long, needs a total investment of US$59.6 million and is expected to open to traffic in September 1998.

Water Project, Shenzhen

Work on a US$164-million-project to divert water to eastern Shenzhen in Guangdong Province started recently. The project will require 56 kilometres of pipeline and the construction of pumping stations and canals. When completed the project will help divert 350 million cubic metres of water annually from two nearby rivers to the city's Songzikeng Reservoir.

Largest Cargo Berth, Qingdao

China's largest cargo handling berth went into operation recently at Qingdao port in East China's Shandong Province. It is the only one in China able to accommodate fifth-generation container ships.

New Sight for Guilin Visitors

Visitors to Guilin, one of the most popular tourist destinations in China, now have a new sight to see – the recently-opened Bagua (the Eight Trigrams) Mountain Resort. Located in Lipu County 110 kilometres outside Guilin, the Bagua Mountain Resort is near one of the most attractive karst caves in the country. The resort has built a model of the Eight Trigrams covering one hectare.

Habitat Protection, Changsha

Hunan Province is planning to put some US$783 million into 151 environmental-protection projects in the coming five years in an attempt to halt further deterioration of the province's environment by the end of the century. The projects will focus on cleaning up polluted water in the four big lakes, collecting garbage left by visitors, and forming an environmental watchdog system.

Geological Wonder, Changchun

A 500 million-year-old geological demarcation line in Northeast China's Jilin Province is one of the country's newest destinations for tourists and geologists from around the world. Experts say the Dayangcha Cambrian-Ordovician geological demarcation line (of which there are only two existent in the world) is the best since it boasts large varieties of fossilised prehistoric creatures and complete deposits. Since the site was discovered some 20 years ago, many geologists have visited the small town of Dayangcha in Jiangyuan County to carry out studies at the 30-metre-long and 7-metre-high colourful rock face.

This geological wonder is less than one hour's drive by car from Baishan City, near the famous scenic Changbai Mountains in Jilin Province. Under the guidance of experts one can identify many fossilised prehistoric creatures such as trilobites and graptolites.

Fossil of Liaoning Bird

Chinese scientists are studying the significance of a fossil unearthed in Beipaio City of Liaoning Province. One group holds that the fossil is a kind of small dinosaur while the other group believes it is the earliest predecessor of birds. The fossil was named *Sinosauropteryx*, meaning "China Dragon Bird" and looks like a cross between a small dinosaur and a bird.

Following the discovery of the fossil of *Confuciusornis* in 1994, several hundred bird fossils have been unearthed in Liaoning. Experts believe the discovery places the evolution of the bird at a much earlier time than previously believed.

Chongqing Lures Investors

By the end of last year a total of 242 overseas-funded enterprises opened in the Chongqing Economic and Technological Development Zone in Sichuan Province involving investments of US$910 million. The 9.6-square-kilometre zone is to consist of three industrial parks off which the Dangui Industrial Park is one, and economists say that the park is expected to achieve 20-30 billion yuan (US$2.41-3.61 billion) in annual output value by the end of this century.

Jiangxi Goes Green

Jiangxi Province in East China is working on a strategy to develop green, environmentally friendly industries and to co-ordinate overall economic development with the aim of protecting the environment.

The relatively underdeveloped province boasts rich natural resources and plans to encourage township enterprises in the production of grain, cotton, poultry and aquatic products in its southern, central and north-western areas.

More over, a tourism belt with a fine ecological environment will be developed in the valley of the Ganjiang River to facilitate the development of the local economy.

Erosion-Control Work for Yangtse

Efforts to control water and soil erosion are under way in the Three Gorges Dam area where one of the world's largest hydra-electric projects is underway. Damming the Yangtse in the Three Gorges area, scheduled for completion later this year, will flood 185 square kilometres of land. The flooded areas will include 21 counties in Sichuan and Hubei provinces and it is within these areas that a programme of afforestation will be carried out in 1989 along the upper and middle reaches of the river in order to control water and soil erosion and to minimise the impact of the dam construction.

At present, a botanical garden covering 7,000 hectares is under construction at Yichang, Hubei Province to transplant rare varieties of wild plants which threaten to be submerged once the dam comes into operation. The garden will be completed by 2000 and cost several billion yuan.

Holiday Resort

Fujian Province plans to use more than 6 billion yuan (US$722 million) over the next 15 years to transform scenic Meizhou Island into a major holiday resort. Located near the central part of the western bank of the Taiwan Straits, the 14.35 square kilometre Meizhou Island has received more than 8 million Chinese and overseas tourists since 1988. Approximately 900,000 of them were followers of the legendary goddess of Mazu from the Taiwan region. Mazu, known as the "Goddess of Sea", is believed to have been born on Meizhou Island.

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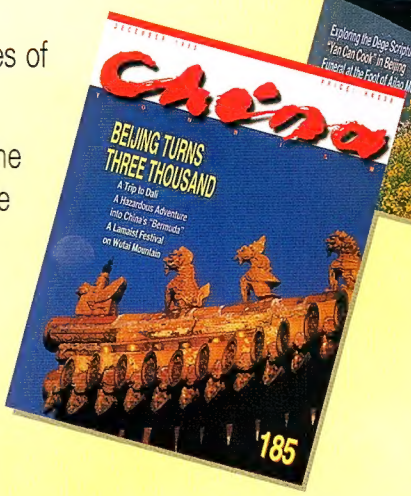

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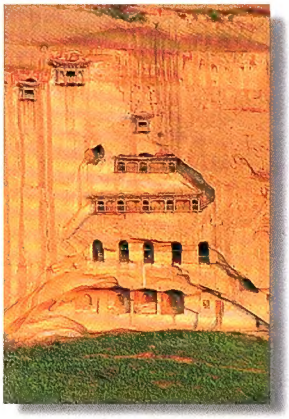

When Emperor Wudi of the Han Dynasty decided to reclaim the border area known as **Hexi Zoulong**, or the West Bank of the Yellow River Corridor, he could never have imagined that 2,000 years after his death this piece of land would come to represent the rich historical legacy of the time. Its landscape and unique folk customs have transformed the area into an ideal tourist destination.

People who love to watch acrobatics may not know anything of the sweetness and bitterness of the acrobats' life and work. Our

correspondent gives you the inside story of an **acrobatic village** in **Liaocheng**, Shandong. Many rare plants abound in **Ma'anshan** in the **Greater Liangshan Mountains** — a photographer who joined a team of

research scientists to the area shares his experience of exploring a world of rare plants. While many are still in mourning for Mr. Deng Xiaoping, we take you to visit this late Chinese statesman's hometown, **Paifang Village**, in Sichuan Province.

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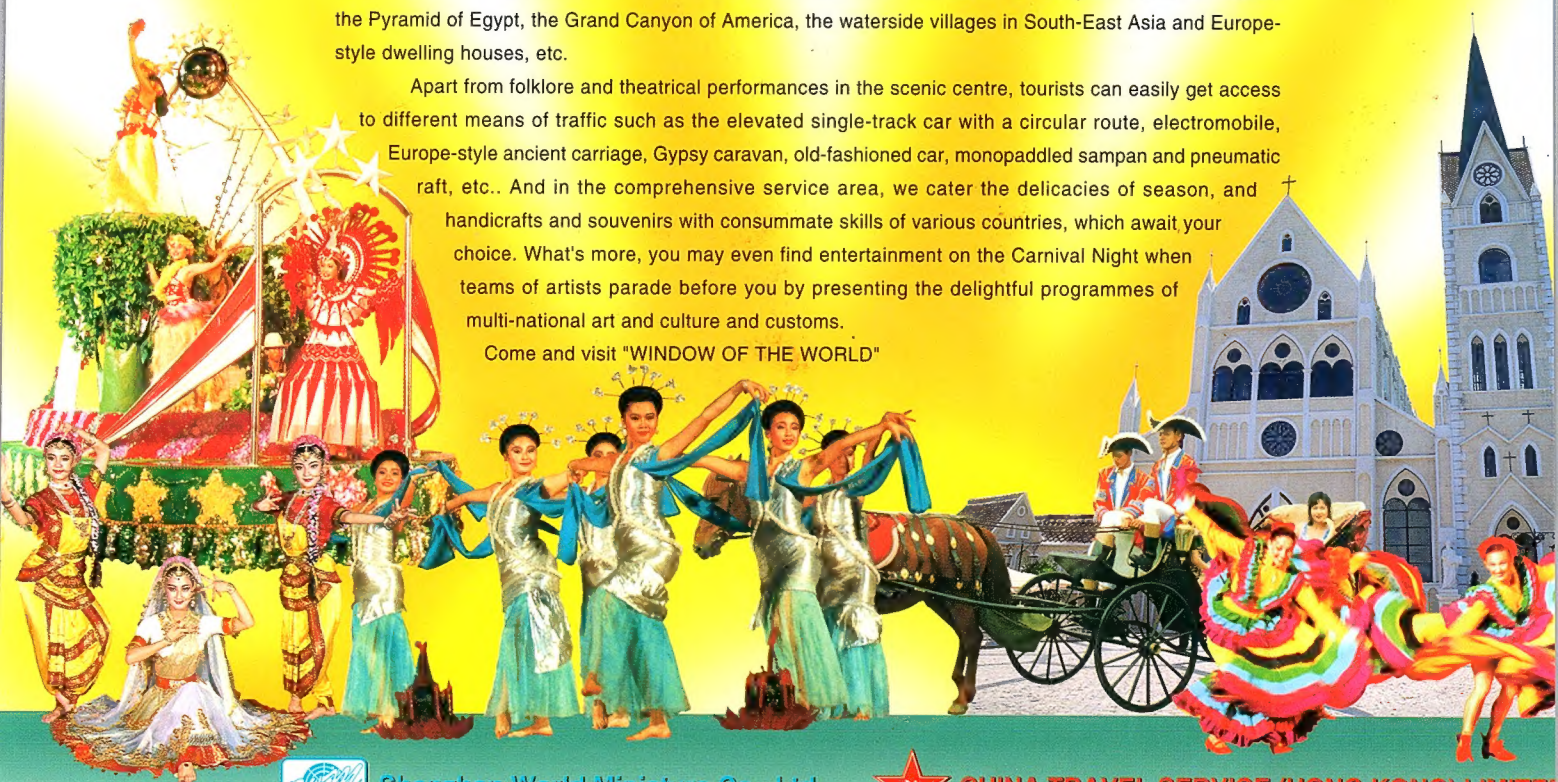

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